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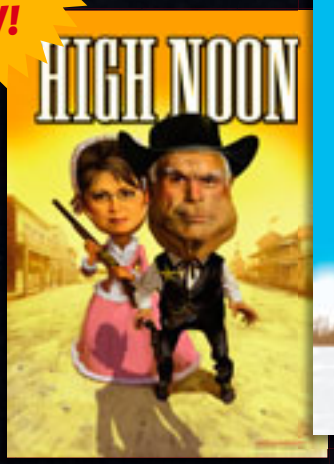

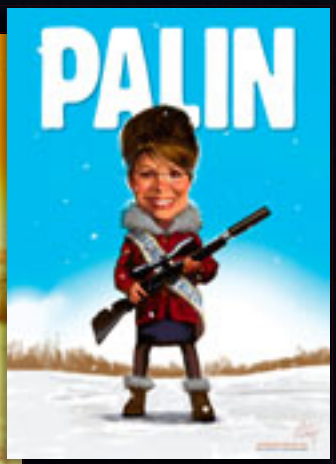

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In the new issue of the Hoover Digest . . .

I'm OK; You're a Selfish, Partisan Hypocrite

A survey of political attitudes finds postpartisan lovey-dovey in short supply.

Social science confirms what political observers have been telling us for a long time: there's a clamor in America to dampen the spirit of intense partisanship that prevails in Washington. This yearning for "transpartisan" politics is a veritable holy rite among independents and moderates. But a survey of voters' attitudes confirms that compromise is an easy word but a hard concept.

For example, more than a third of Democrats and almost half of Republicans insist that party leaders should "stick to their principles even if it means nothing gets done." It seems they want compromise on their own terms: that the other side break ranks and join the side of light in exchange for a pat on the back. Worse still, Republicans and Democrats alike have a stubborn belief in both their own virtues (open-minded, generous, honest) and their opponents' flaws (mean, selfish, closed-minded). Oddly, neither side worries much about its children marrying into the enemy camp. Is this how political independents are born?

—By James W. Ceaser

What a "Change" Candidate . . . Won't

Our new president will face familiar friends and even more familiar foes.

When President Bush leaves office, will America be liked by most of the world? Not necessarily. Our new president will still be confronted by a world that either appreciates America or, for self-interested reasons, will challenge it. Long-term global challenges are bipartisan concerns—neither caused by conservative Republicans nor solved by easy answers from liberal Democrats.

A hopeful view takes in a stabilizing Iraq; new friends in Germany, France, and Africa; and a Taliban kept at bay in Afghanistan. But balance that with a newly resurgent Russia, proud and angry and flush with petrodollars, and an Iran that still wants to build a bomb and menace its neighbors. The war on terrorism, which predated Bush, also will outlast him. Our rivals across the globe suspect we are played out—short of energy, long on debt, and hogging the world's resources. They think the future is theirs, the past ours. They will surely challenge the next president, however nice, to prove them wrong.

—By Victor Davis Hanson

Paid for by the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

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BPA INTERNATIONAL

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Shriver vs. Begala? Just You Wait.

When *Tropic Thunder*, the recent Ben Stiller comedy, opened at the box office in August, Timothy Shriver, chairman and CEO of the Special Olympics, demonstrated at its Hollywood premiere and wrote an angry piece for CNN.com protesting the movie's "offensive" use of the word "retard." He complained to a popular blog about *Tropic Thunder*'s "humiliating portrayal of people with intellectual disabilities," and lamented in the *Washington Post* that "people with intellectual disabilities . . . [are] such an easy target that many people don't realize whom they are making fun of when they use the word 'retard.' Most people just think it's funny. 'Stupid, idiot, moron, retard.' Ha, ha, ha."

Ha, ha, ha, indeed. So The Scrapbook was a little surprised a couple of weeks ago when Paul Begala, the Democratic publicist and TV personality, referred to President Bush on CNN as "a high-functioning moron." Strong stuff, in The Scrapbook's view, coming from the co-author (with James Carville) of *Buck Up, Suck Up . . . and Come Back When You Foul Up* (2003)—and of course, demeaning both to George W. Bush and "people with intellectual disabilities." Wait till Timothy Shriver, chairman and CEO of the Special Olympics, hears about this!

Well, The Scrapbook has waited, and waited, and waited a little longer, and to our mystification, Timothy Shriver has had nothing to say about Paul Begala and his "high-functioning moron" crack. Sure, the object of Begala's contempt was President Bush, but there's no escaping the fact that he garnered a laugh at Bush's expense by humiliating "people with intellectual disabilities"—or "morons," in Paul Begala's lexicon.

The Scrapbook may be many things, but cynical isn't one of them, so we're sure Chairman Shriver's unaccountable silence has nothing to do with the fact that he's the son of Eunice Kennedy Shriver, younger brother of Maria Shriver Schwarzenegger, and a prominent Democrat. We cannot imagine that Chairman Shriver would countenance such cruelty just because the victim of Begala's insensitivity is a Republican! We can only guess that Chairman Shriver somehow missed the "high-functioning moron" attack on CNN.

Now that he's been notified, we eagerly await his next op-ed, not to mention the picketing of CNN's studios. ♦

The Descent of 'Newsweek'

The next time you stumble across a snarky, condescending, sneering, and semi-informed essay in *Newsweek*—which is to say, the next time you open the pages of *Newsweek*—and you feel instructed and rebuked, The Scrapbook suggests you remember the name Kurt Soller. He's the author of a snarky, condescending, sneering, and semi-informed piece in the current issue entitled "The Man Who Would Be King." It's about an 82-year-old Texan named Paul Emery Washington who, if George Washington had become our monarch rather than president in 1789, would be the American king.

Why? Because, as Soller explains, "Paul Emery Washington is a descendant of George Washington" and, as he mentions a few paragraphs later, there are "nearly 8,000 living descendants of Washington" abroad in the land.

To which The Scrapbook can only respond, huh? There was a time when every schoolboy knew that George Washington, in fact, didn't have any descendants, but that time has passed. He and Martha had a happy 40-year marriage, but no children—perhaps because a youthful bout of smallpox, followed by tuberculosis, might have left the Father of Our Country unable to father children.

Widowed when she married George, Martha had two children from her previous marriage, who were raised by the Washingtons, and two orphaned grandchildren and a nephew grew up at Mount Vernon. So while there are people who may claim a collateral family connection to George Washington, there has never been anyone at any time who is or was a "descendant of George Washington."

A small matter, perhaps, but no smaller than the snarky, condescending, sneering, and semi-informed coverage of John McCain and Sarah Palin in *Newsweek*. If The Scrapbook maintained anything like *Newsweek*'s "Conventional Wisdom Watch," the arrow would be pointing resolutely downward on *Newsweek*. ♦

Never Having to Say You're Sorry

Here's a CNN.com headline from last week: "Murtha apologizes for calling western Pennsylvania 'racist.'" The story then runs: "Pennsylvania Rep. John Murtha, a supporter of Barack Obama's presidential bid, apologized Thursday for calling western Pennsylvania 'a racist area.' 'While we cannot deny that race is a factor in this election, I believe we've been able to look beyond race these past few months, and that voters today are concerned with the policy differences of our two candidates and their vision for the future of our great country,' he said in a statement issued by his office.

"'Senator Obama has shown sound

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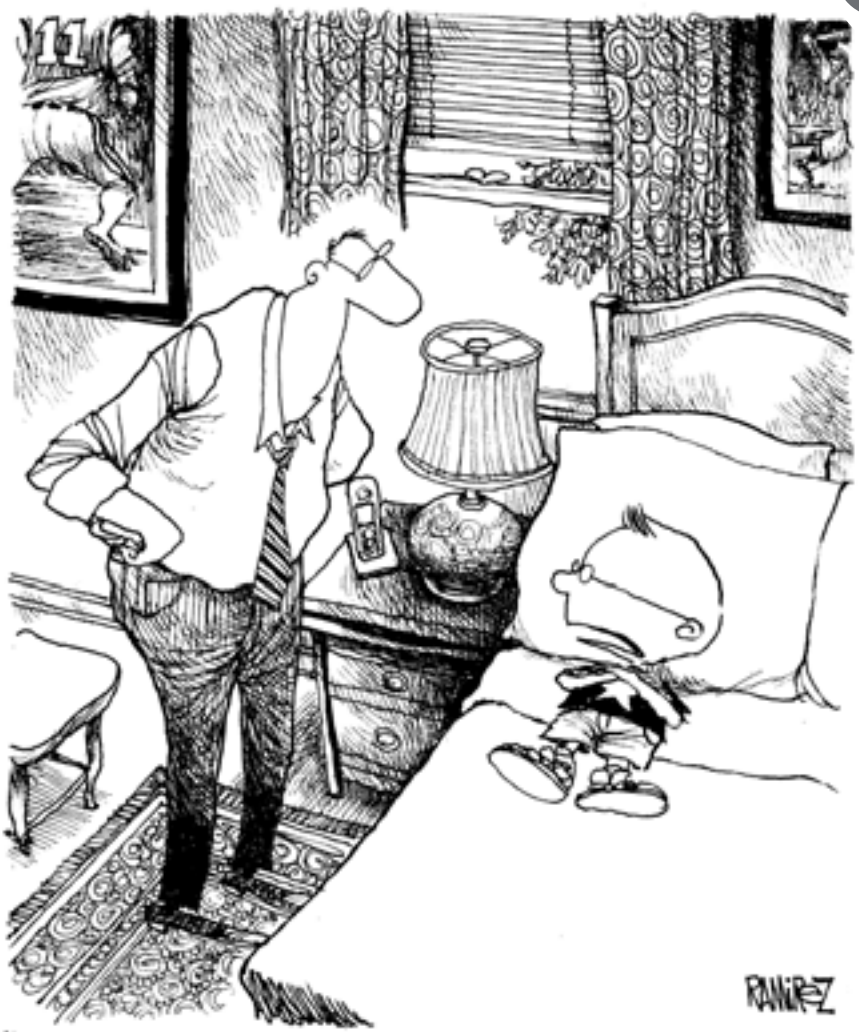

"RESTRICTION? I WAS THINKING MORE ALONG THE LINES OF A MILLION DOLLAR BAIL OUT."

judgment and has presented us with a change from the failed policies of George Bush and John McCain. I believe he will win both Pennsylvania and the White House.'"

Spot the apology? Neither did we. ♦

Hard Case Court

There The Scrapbook was, enjoying its morning coffee and flipping through Supreme Court orders—just another day at the office—when up pops the Court's denial of cert to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. The case involved standards of probable cause in a drug bust. Chief Justice John Roberts dissented, but he did so in an unusual way: He decided to write it in the style of a hard-boiled novel. Here's how it starts:

> North Philly, May 4, 2001. Officer Sean Devlin, Narcotics Strike Force, was working the morning shift. Undercover surveillance. The neighborhood? Tough as a three-dollar steak. Devlin knew. Five years on the beat, nine months with the Strike Force. He'd made fifteen, twenty drug busts in the neighborhood.
>
> Devlin spotted him: a lone man on the corner. Another approached. Quick exchange of words. Cash handed over; small objects handed back. Each man then quickly on his own way. Devlin knew the guy wasn't buying bus tokens. He radioed a description and Officer Stein picked up the buyer. Sure enough: three bags of crack in the guy's pocket. Head downtown and book him. Just another day at the office.

Remember: The above passage was written by the chief justice of the United States, not Mickey Spillane, Elmore Leonard, or Donald Westlake. Let's hope the chief uses his off hours to finish what looks to be a crackling caper. He's extremely talented.

Naturally, Barack Obama voted against his confirmation. ♦

Messiah Watch (cont'd)

'Nobody seemed to consider that [Obama] sweats less because he's in such good shape. It's obvious he's an athlete from his physical grace alone. . . . As for Obama, he does move like a silky small forward, which is part of his appeal. I witnessed a showcase of his physical skills upon our arrival in Lansing, as he executed the perfect plane dismount while waving at the Secret Service guys." (Peter Moore, *Men's Health*, November 2008) ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

'Are we witnessing the reemergence of the far right as a power in American politics? Has John McCain, inadvertently perhaps, become the midwife of a new movement built around fear, xenophobia and anger? McCain has clearly . . . " (E.J. Dionne Jr., *Washington Post*, October 15) ♦

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Casual

Watchers of the Skies

This summer, in the unlikely pages of the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, two astronomers made a grand literary announcement. It was precisely April 16, 1178 B.C., they declared, when crafty Odysseus, peerless and bold, threw off his beggar's rags, slew the hungry suitors infesting his home, and joined the fair Penelope back in his great-rooted bed. A careful reading of the astronomical evidence in Homer's *Odyssey* proves it to be so.

To which one wants to reply with a firm *Um*. Or maybe *Er*. Some caveatical noise, anyway—the kind of sound we make when people are so far off in left field they're not playing baseball anymore. I remember this sensation of not knowing even how to begin an answer. Back when I was teaching philosophy, I once had a student turn in an essay that began: "As Karl Marx wrote in his famous book *Selected Writings of Karl Marx*. . . ." And I got the odd, sinking feeling—familiar to every teacher—that seems to demand you scribble the entire text of Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* in the margins of the student's paper. Either that, or circle the sentence, draw a question mark beside it, and let the whole thing go.

I get the same feeling, sometimes, while listening to people who suppose that success in one field guarantees their success in other fields: the scientists who wander into theology, the businessmen who opine about philosophy, the journalists who want to talk about Shakespeare. Even when they're brilliant, it's often a nutty kind of brilliance—the genius of autodidacts and opsimaths who imagine that, mugging up a topic, they'll find *The Simple Answer That No One Ever Thought of Before!*

Not that this summer's article on Homer is a particularly outrageous instance. Even back in antiquity there were readers who claimed that Book 20 of the *Odyssey* describes an actual eclipse. And in the 1920s, astronomers pointed out that the only available Bronze Age eclipse was in the spring of 1178 B.C.

DARREN GYGI

What Marcelo Magnasco of Rockefeller University and Constantino Baikouzis of the Observatorio Astronómico de La Plata now add is a reading of Homer's other astronomical references. The *Odyssey* says the Pleiades and the Boötes are both visible while Odysseus is sailing. Venus is shining near dawn when he arrives in Ithaca. There's a new moon the night before he slaughters the suitors. And Homer tells us that the god Hermes (read as the planet Mercury) has gone on a journey to the far west.

You see what that means, of course:

> Requiring that the sinking of Odysseus' raft be after the equinox (1 April) yet on or before the heliacal setting of the Pleiades (4 April) yields only one T(i) every 6 years; one-third of these have a high Venus, and Mercury's sterigmos happens once every 116 days, so the references can be matched exactly only one day every 2,000 years.

There's a long history of reading premodern texts as though their authors had modern obsessions with temporal and geographical exactness. In fact, what ancient works typically reveal is literary obsessions with consistent tropes and symbolism. Still, that didn't stop a 17th-century Anglican bishop named James Ussher from adding up the ages of the patriarchs in the Old Testament to arrive at October 23, 4004 B.C., as the precise date of Creation. And it didn't stop the brilliantly nutty Heinrich Schliemann from deciding the *Iliad* was exact history—and in 1870, following tips gleaned from Homer, announcing he had discovered the actual site of Troy.

Here's the funny thing, though: It's people like this who genuinely seem to love literature. Sure, they've completely missed the point, but at least they still believe that Homer was trying to say something valuable. Around 200 scholarly books on the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were published last year, and to browse them is to find scant love for their subject. The Greeks were exploiters, oppressors, and misogynists, we learn, and Homer wrote the founding texts of imperialism, capitalism, and fascism. The past is wicked, let us count the ways—according to modern scholars, that's about all the great epics have to teach.

Who wouldn't prefer to read Magnasco and Baikouzis's explanation that in the 31st eclipse in Saros Series 39 "all planets were visible simultaneously on a 90° arc on the ecliptic"? At least these astronomers have a sense that there might really be a truth lurking in the old, old story of Odysseus—that sneaky, bold, and victorious character: son of Laertes, wielder of stratagems, wise-hearted, glorious, and god-like.

Joseph Bottum

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Car Seat Regulation

Thank you to Jonathan V. Last, whose "Notes from the Nanny State" (October 6) confirmed what I suspected for a long time. I wonder if there are any statistics on how car seat laws compromise safety? Years ago we maintained peace in our family car by keeping our fighting kids in the opposite corners. Ever since the children were relegated to the rear seat, drivers turn their heads back to monitor the misbehavior behind them. Some of the parents stop the car to do that, but some do not, and I have witnessed quite dangerous situations arising from drivers turning back to soothe or discipline kids while driving.

Mark Chulsky
Swampscott, Mass.

Jonathan V. Last's article made me think back to my childhood when there were no child bicycle helmet laws in my home state. I unfortunately took a couple of nasty spills on my bike as a kid (some I should be thankful that I was able to walk away from—one when I was alone and probably blacked out). When I see kids wearing even bulky styrofoam helmets, I often think that I wish those laws had been on the books when I was a kid. Though given Last's car seat theme, should it require the state to convince parents to make kids wear a helmet when they ride bicycles?

He has a valid point about diminishing returns and how much all this safety costs us in time and convenience.

Ben Daniel
Atlanta, Ga.

Losing Allies

James Kirchick asserts ("The Example of Our Power," October 6) that many people in the world, in particular Islamist extremists and other enemies of America, will hate America no matter how we behave. This is true. The article then implies that the left is so softheaded that it thinks that we can bring these enemies around if we act better. Not so.

Most Democrats, independents, and moderate Republicans know that ending torture, closing Guantánamo, and making sure there are no more Abu Ghraibs will do absolutely nothing to change how we are viewed by the Taliban or al Qaeda. We are concerned that our image with our friends and allies has been so sullied that we will be forced to battle international terrorism completely on our own, and we do not believe we can win the war on terror alone. We are losing friends and potential friends by adopting tactics unworthy of the United States.

Ed Baker
East Lansing, Mich.

Fashion Fan

As a person who worships at the House of Fashion, I can honestly say Samantha Sault's "Where the Elite Meet" (October 13) is one of the best pieces on Fashion Week I have read this year. From the coverage on *Fashion Week Daily* to the reports in the *New York Times*, Sault really brings a great perspective to the importance of Fashion Week. Although I've never been able to attend myself, I appreciate her ability to give me a front row look into the world I'm obsessed with.

Anna Lafferre
Arlington, Va.

An Idiot's Errand

A Manhattan project in energy is an idiot's errand ("Manhattan Project as Metaphor" by Ari Rabkin, October 20), proving that the anti-hydrocarbon left doesn't understand engineering. Take solar, for instance. The science behind solar is well understood. At issue is the engineering and the manufacturing, and making a highly efficient, cheap, long-lasting solar module. Then there is the inverter that takes DC power and makes it into AC power. There is no getting around that these things, made up of many parts, will fail, and fail often. There will be no replacement parts for these expensive components of solar, so they need to be replaced every 10 years or thereabouts. A survey of the multiple manufacturers said that it was highly improbable that they could make an inverter that would last 20 years without costing a fortune. There is no magic energy wand unless they want to go after that pipe dream of fusion. If not, the only remaining economical option is nuclear, but many on the left hate nuclear power. "Hope" won't bring "change" when it comes to basic engineering.

Brendan P. Dooher
Danville, Calif.

A McCain Country

As an Israeli-American Jew living in Israel for the past 28 years, I found Willy Stern's "Where the Jews Vote Republican" (October 13) insightful and accurate. His assessment that John McCain is the most popular candidate for president among Jewish Israelis and expatriates like me is absolutely correct. In fact, I have four adult sons who all hold American citizenship, and my wife, all of my sons, and I mailed in our absentee ballots with John McCain's name checked off as our choice. Believe me, most of the journalists who come here to visit write the most fantastic and wild tales which have only a bare connection to reality. Indeed, many Israelis wonder if the people who write about our country have ever even been here.

Ken Besig
Kiryat Arba, Israel

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the weekly Standard

Here They Come

It's time to face facts. In-your-face liberalism is about to make a comeback. And this time it will be on steroids.

Next year the Democrats will control both houses of Congress, most likely with comfortable, perhaps filibuster-proof majorities. If there is a Democratic president, too, Washington will host one of the most liberal governments in American history. Barack Obama, Joe Biden, Nancy Pelosi, and Harry Reid are more than ready to make staggeringly liberal changes in the country's economic, social, and foreign policy.

To get a sense of the Democrats' ambitions, listen to them discuss the deficit. They spent the last eight years bemoaning the deficit, which they blamed on the Bush tax cuts. They continually lambasted the Republicans for fiscal irresponsibility. They promised to enact "pay-as-you-go" budget rules and restore accountability.

Thing is, now that power is within their grasp, the Democrats have chucked all that silly talk out the window. They can't wait to raise taxes on high-earners, dividends, capital gains, corporations, oil companies, and estates. But this tax increase is not meant to balance the budget. It's in the name of "fairness," and "patriotism," and whatever revenue it raises will quickly be spent.

Obama says Washington needs to "invest" tax dollars in alternative energy, infrastructure, health insurance subsidies, and education before it starts worrying about deficit reduction. Paul Krugman writes that "now is not the time to worry about the deficit." Pelosi wants Congress to pass another $300 billion economic stimulus package by the end of the year—even though the previous $300 billion Congress spent last winter had no discernible effect. The GOP has been horrible on spending. The Democrats will be worse.

Then there's "card-check" legislation, which is, and we are not making this up, too liberal for George McGovern. Card-check would eliminate the secret ballot in union elections. Instead, a workplace would be unionized once a certain number of employees signed cards saying they wanted a union. This is great news if you are a boss at the jointfitters' local who wants to branch out into more "legitimate" enterprises. Under card-check, all that will be required is for you to send some employees—large, well-dressed, tatooed men with clever nicknames like "Walnuts" and "The Chin"—over to the nearby office park to "collect" signatures.

But card-check is bad news for just about everybody else. Unions hurt productivity. They freeze labor markets. They cause unemployment to rise. They politicize the workplace, increase bureaucracy, and weigh down business with regulations and negotiations. And they were a major factor behind the 1970s wage-price spiral, which contributed to stagflation.

The Democrats will undoubtedly pursue some of their other favorite activities, such as expanding government health care and enacting a cap-and-trade regime on carbon emissions guaranteed to raise energy prices. They may even reimpose the "Fairness Doctrine," which is, naturally, neither fair nor technically a doctrine. It's a Truman-era regulation requiring broadcasters to devote a certain number of hours to public affairs, and to present contrasting views.

Sounds nice. In reality, though, the Fairness Doctrine is an onerous and antidemocratic rule. Before the Reaganites dropped it in 1985, the nation's broadcasters, in order to avoid penalty, decided to feature almost no public affairs programming at all, and then only the most boring programming possible. That changed. The Fairness Doctrine's demise led to vigorous public debate, and to a new platform—talk radio—for conservatives. Reinstating it would be an assault on free speech. This would not stop Pelosi.

Add to this the protectionist measures the Democrats are sure to pass, and you have a recipe for disaster. There's a term for an economic program of government spending, higher taxes, and tariffs. It's called Hooverism. It didn't work out so well the last time, and this time it's likely to make the current recession worse.

A centrist Democrat with more experience might be able to tame Congress's worst excesses. But Obama will be America's most liberal president in decades, possibly ever, and he has almost no experience at all. His short career in politics has shown him to be a go-along, get-along kind of guy. How can anyone imagine his standing up to liberal bulls like Charles Rangel, Barney Frank, John Conyers, Henry Waxman, John Dingell, Charles Schumer, or Carl Levin?

It's true John McCain hasn't had much luck running against Obama (so far!). But that luck might change if McCain ran against the Democratic Congress in addition—and against the prospect of undivided, unchecked, liberal Democratic government. Compared with that, even "gridlock" might start sounding pretty good to the American people. After all, they didn't much like one-party, big-government conservatism. They should really be worried about one-party, big-government liberalism.

—Matthew Continetti, for the Editors

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Sarah Palin's Future

Alaska's most valuable resource.

BY FRED BARNES

Campaigning in Greenville, N.C., Oct. 7

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Elon, North Carolina

Six thousand tickets were grabbed up in three hours for Sarah Palin's speech here at the baseball field of Elon University. An even larger crowd—9,000 inside, 3,000 outside—showed up across the state in Greenville a few days earlier. But impressive attendance isn't the half of it. What's extraordinary is the effect Palin has on crowds. "When she hits the stage audiences erupt and they don't calm down," says Republican senator Richard Burr of North Carolina, who appeared with Palin here and in Greenville. "I've been with Bush, Clinton, 41—and I've never seen anything like this."

Her speech—a standard stump speech extolling John McCain and zinging Barack Obama—hardly matters. People not only want to see her, Burr says, "they want to touch her. Their perception is she's one of them. It has nothing to do with ideology. It's not about Christian conservatives. It goes far beyond all that."

Whatever else the 2008 presidential campaign may produce, it has created a new Republican star—Palin—a political natural who's at ease in front of crowds and whose cheerfulness, self-confidence, and optimism haven't slackened in the face of unusually harsh—and often highly personal—attacks by Democrats and the mainstream media.

Palin can't explain the exuberant crowds or is too modest to try. She "didn't know what to expect" once she began campaigning as McCain's vice presidential running mate, she told me last week. The enthusiasm is "encouraging and energizing," she says, and "the most pleasant surprise has been independents and Democrats who've shown such great enthusiasm."

Palin's appeal is not that hard to define. She's neither outspoken nor eloquent. And the conservatism she espouses is fairly conventional. It's who she is—her story, her biography—that has stirred fascination and enables her to connect with voters. She's a mother of five, a serious Christian, a tough-minded governor of Alaska, a fearless slayer of (male) political bigwigs, a beauty queen, a hunter. Palin, as best I can describe it, exudes a kind of middle-class magnetism. It's subdued but nonetheless very powerful.

Republicans, even some McCain advisers, have yet to realize the enormous asset they have in Palin: She's the party's most crowd-pleasing and exciting figure since Ronald Reagan. Okay, she's not a "new Reagan." That role will remain eternally unfilled. Palin lacks Reagan's decades of political involvement, his knowledge, and especially his grounding in conservative thought.

Her conservatism is more instinctive. Her Republican heroes, besides

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McCain, come to a grand total of two, Reagan and Lincoln. And for now, she's a neophyte in national politics, having been picked by McCain less than two months ago.

But Palin does have a few of Reagan's skills. Reagan used to say that having been an actor often came in handy in politics. Palin tosses off corny lines like "Say it ain't so, Joe," the one she ad-libbed in her debate with Joe Biden. She knows how to speed to the end of a sentence when a burst of applause is coming. She's adept at accentuating a point—for instance, the "news flash" for the media in her convention speech. She can act. And of course she winks.

Several of the Palin tales I've heard from those who've worked with her in the campaign are quite revealing. She famously kept going without a hitch in her convention address despite a TelePrompTer that rushed past paragraphs before she could read them.

When she left the stage, Fred Thompson, the actor and former Republican presidential candidate, asked about the problem, one that might have rattled a veteran speaker. "It was okay," she said matter-of-factly. "I had the script in front of me."

Palin's stage presence and an Obama-like composure while in the spotlight surprised her campaign handlers. She practiced the convention speech more than a dozen times. But her best performance by far came when she actually delivered the speech before more than 20,000 people at the convention and a national television audience of roughly 37 million. "It was like she'd been doing this all her life," a Republican associate said. His point was that she had never before done anything even close to that.

Another Republican (a Palin admirer) told me that in a room of 20 women, you'd never pick out Palin as the one who's the elected governor. "She doesn't stand out in a group the way Reagan did," the Republican said. "But when she goes into these places [for campaign rallies], it's different. She's got this extra thing."

The campaign advisers assigned to prepare Palin for media interviews and the veep debate couldn't have missed this quality. But they simply didn't trust her to perform adequately in those settings. She would need weeks of intense training and study. They were wrong, and at Palin's expense.

In the weeks after the convention, she was limited to two major TV interviews. When she did poorly in one—the Katie Couric interview—Democrats and hostile columnists unloaded, calling her unqualified to be vice president. There was little contrary evidence in the press by which to judge her or defend her.

Palin's appeal is not that hard to define. It's who she is—her story, her biography—that has stirred fascination and enables her to connect with voters. She's a mother of five, a serious Christian, a tough-minded governor, a fearless slayer of (male) political bigwigs, a beauty queen, a hunter.

I asked Palin whether she'd do things differently if she could repeat those weeks. She answered by silently mouthing "yes." When two aides—we were on a McCain-Palin bus with staff and security—said "yes" aloud, she chimed in, "Yes … yes, yes, yes."

The alternative would have been what she's doing now: three or four talk radio shows a day, plus interviews on local TV and cable news, appearances on some national shows such as *Saturday Night Live*, and chats with local print reporters and a few national political writers.

It should have been obvious she could handle the media. When I spent nearly two hours with Palin last year at the governor's house in Juneau, I was struck by three things. She's very smart, brimming with self-confidence, and not intimidated by the media.

Now, despite her political talent, Palin's future is unclear. If McCain wins the election, that will simplify her political life. She'll be America's first female vice president and the most prominent national leader aside from McCain. And she'll be heir apparent to President McCain.

If McCain loses, she'll still be governor of Alaska. In fact, she'll be the state's most famous governor ever and its first political celebrity. That won't be enough to make her an influential player in national affairs. Palin, by the way, is unsure about her ultimate role in national politics even if McCain wins, but it's bound to be more complicated if he loses.

"I don't know what kind of role the Republican party would want me to play," she told me. "In the past, I have not been one to be considered for anything by the hierarchy of the party. Certainly not in my state. In some sense, I ran against my party."

Palin remains skeptical of Republicans. "I would love to promote the party ideals if we're going to live out the ideals and maybe allow other American voters to understand what the principles of the party are," she says. "We've got to be assured we have enough people in the party who will live out those ideals and it's not just rhetoric. Otherwise, I'd be wasting my time. There are a lot of things I would and should be doing."

There's a model, however, for a small state governor who wants to be a national politician. It's the Bill Clinton model. While he was merely governor of Arkansas, he spoke all over the country, headed a moderate Democratic organization, courted national political reporters, and connected with a group of smart, young political operatives.

Palin could do the same, but not easily. She has young children, no team of political strategists to advise her, and is from a state even more remote than Arkansas. Whether they know it or not, Republicans have a huge stake in Palin. If, after the election, they let her slip into political obscurity, they'll be making a tragic mistake. ♦

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Loathing Sarah Palin

The Two Months Hate of feminists.

BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN

GARY LOCKE

The liberal women I know—and most of the women I seem to know are liberal—loathe Sarah Palin. They don't merely dislike her, the way one tends to dislike politicians whose views are not one's own, they actively detest her. When her name comes up—and it is they who tend to bring it up—their complexions take on a slightly purplish tinge, their eyes cross in rage. "Moron" is their most frequently used noun, though "idiot" comes up a fair number of times; "that woman" is yet another choice. A wide variety of adjectives, differing only slightly in their violence, usually precede these epithets.

Liberal men don't show the same fervent distaste for Governor Palin. They are more likely to say she doesn't come close to being qualified for the job of vice president and is frightening to contemplate as president. They might add that his choice of Sarah Palin is a serious sign of John McCain's flawed judgment, or of his political opportunism. The standard phrase "a heartbeat away" may come up. But then they let it go. They don't take Sarah Palin so personally, so passionately, as their liberal female counterparts do; the element of anger isn't there.

During his presidential campaign Mike Huckabee expressed a set of opinions not strikingly different from Sarah Palin's, yet my guess is that if he were John McCain's running mate these same women would not despise him with the same vehemence they do Sarah Palin. Some of this is due to snobbery, some possibly to envy. Governor Palin is, after all, a good-looking woman with what appears to be a happy family life who has achieved a great deal in a relatively brief time. But above all Sarah Palin's opinions, because they are held by her, a woman, suggest betrayal.

One might think that liberal women would have some admiration for Governor Palin's appearing to have solved the working mother problem that bedevils most contemporary American women. She is very feminine yet doesn't regard herself as a victim, and seems to be entirely at ease with men. Here is a woman raising five children who is able not only to have an active hand in the life of her community but actually win the highest political office in her state. As the governor of Alaska, moreover, she took on the corrupt elements in her own party, which requires courage of a kind liberated women especially, one would think, might admire.

Perhaps Sarah Palin's having a pregnant teenage daughter permits these same women to feel that she hasn't really solved the working mother problem after all. Yet teenage pregnancy is something that anyone who has a daughter or a granddaughter lives in terror of, for it can happen, as they say, in the best of families. Yet Sarah Palin seems to be handling this, too, with a measure of dignified calm and tolerance that most of us, in similar circumstances, probably couldn't bring to it. But she gets no credit for this either, at least not from the women I know who so relentlessly contemn her.

Strongly liberal women get most agitated over the issue—though of course to them it is no issue but a long since resolved matter—of abortion. Abortion, to be sure, is the great third-rail subject in American politics. But when a male politician is against abortion, these women can write that off as the ignorance of a standard politician, if not himself a Christian fundamentalist, then another Republican cynically going after the fundamentalist vote.

Joseph Epstein, a contributing editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD, *is the author most recently of* Fred Astaire.

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A woman not in favor of abortion is something quite different.

And it is all the more strikingly different when the same woman not only holds this opinion on abortion but acts on it and knowingly bears a child with Down syndrome, a child that most liberal women would have thought reason required aborting. What else, after all, is abortion for?

A few months ago *Vanity Fair* ran an article about the discovery that the playwright Arthur Miller, with his third wife, the photographer Inge Morath, 40 or so years ago had a Down syndrome son. Miller promptly clapped the boy into an institution—according to the article, not a first class one either—and never saw the child again. Most people would have taken this for a heartless act, one should have thought, especially on the part of a man known for excoriating the putative cruelties of capitalism and the endless barbarities of his own country's governments, whether Democratic or Republican. Yet, so far as one can tell, Arthur Miller's treatment of his own child has not put the least dent in his reputation, while Sarah Palin's having, keeping, and loving her Down syndrome child is somehow, by the standard of the liberal woman of our day, not so secretly thought the act of an obviously backward and ignorant woman, an affront to womanhood. "Her greatest hypocrisy," proclaimed Wendy Doniger, one of the leading feminist lights at the University of Chicago, "is her pretense that she is a woman."

The daughter of a dear friend of mine used to say of her mother, "I sense her rage." Of course when the daughter said this, my friend's rage would only increase. Suggesting that liberal women feel rage over Sarah Palin is, similarly, likely only to enrage them all the more. But rage in their reaction to Governor Palin is emphatically what I do sense on the part of liberal women—that and delight in any attempt to humiliate her. (Tina Fey, take a bow, and, hey, let's watch that Katie Couric YouTube interview one more time!) I wonder if the women who loathe Sarah Palin with such intensity oughtn't perhaps to reexamine the source of their strongly illiberal feelings. ♦

It Ain't Over Till It's Over

The case against pessimism.

BY JAMES PIERESON

With just two weeks left before the election, John McCain faces a difficult test in overcoming the lead established by Barack Obama over the past month. An ever-growing number of national polls showed Obama with a lead last week of somewhere between 3 and 14 points—though few people outside the Obama camp gave much credit to the latter margin, reported in a CBS News/*New York Times* poll. Most polls were in a cluster with an estimated Obama lead of 5 to 7 points. The race thus remains surprisingly close, especially in view of the headwinds blowing against McCain from the financial turmoil that erupted into public view in mid-September.

Notwithstanding this fact, however, many pundits, pollsters, and public figures have rushed forward to declare the race over and Obama the presumptive winner. Liberal columnists, such as E.J. Dionne and Harold Meyerson, have declared that Obama's pending victory will mark the end of the conservative era and doom for the low tax and free market policies favored by Republicans since the late 1970s. House speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate majority leader Harry Reid are already developing a legislative agenda that they will introduce in Congress in January in cooperation with the new Democratic administration. Senator Obama himself is said to be making plans for an election night victory celebration.

James Piereson, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, is the author of Camelot and the Cultural Revolution: How the Assassination of John F. Kennedy Shattered American Liberalism.

If John McCain can find any solace in these developments, it must be in the fact that his role has been clarified as the underdog who has been written off as a loser by the pundits and pollsters. The premature gloating on view among liberal columnists and the postelection plans being made by Obama and his allies might be turned by McCain to his own advantage. If there is anything voters do not like, it is being taken for granted by politicians.

There is some precedent in the elections of 1948, 1968, and 1976 for the kind of late in the game comeback that McCain must now try to engineer. In the tumultuous election of 1968, Senator Hubert Humphrey trailed Richard Nixon by 12 points (43 to 31 percent) in a Gallup poll published on October 22. George Wallace, the third party candidate that year, claimed 20 percent of the vote. Nixon's lead was undiminished in late October from where it stood when the campaign began in early September. Many declared the race over, as Nixon began announcing plans for the transition. Less than a week later, however, Humphrey had chiseled the lead down to 8 points (44 to 36 percent), mainly at the expense of Wallace's vote, which dropped to 15 percent.

The final Gallup poll, released on the day before the election, gave Nixon a two point lead, 42 to 40 percent—in other words, a dead heat. Humphrey surged in the last weeks of the campaign by playing upon longstanding fears among Democrats about Nixon's character and by persuading conservative Democrats to abandon Wallace. In the end, his rally fell short as Nixon won by less than 1 percent of the

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vote, just 500,000 votes nationwide.

Gerald Ford's furious finish against Jimmy Carter in 1976 was of a different character than the Humphrey rally, which proceeded by bringing traditional Democrats back into the fold. Ford was able to cut into Carter's lead by appealing to independent voters who by 1976 represented more than a third of the electorate (here perhaps some precedent for McCain). Ford had trailed Carter by more than 30 points in polls taken in July and by 18 points in late August. His pardon of President Nixon in early September combined with the difficult economic conditions of the mid-1970s led many to conclude that the race was over before it even began.

Ford did not help himself with a blunder in the second presidential debate whereby he denied that Eastern Europeans lived under Soviet domination. Yet by raising questions about Carter's competence to lead and by attacking Carter's promise to pardon all Vietnam draft resisters, he cut the lead to 6 points by mid-October. On the eve of the election, the polls declared the race a dead heat. A Gallup poll taken on the last weekend of the race even gave Ford a 1 point lead, 47 to 46 percent. In the end, the structural obstacles to his campaign (a bad economy and the hangover from Watergate) were too much for Ford to overcome. He lost by two points nationally, 50 to 48 percent.

The most dramatic electoral comeback of modern times was, of course, Harry Truman's victory over Governor Thomas Dewey in the election of 1948. Public opinion polling was then still in its infancy, and Truman's surprise victory came close to discrediting the industry altogether. At that time there were just two major polling organizations, Gallup and Roper, both of which reported significant leads for Dewey. Elmo Roper, much to his regret, took a single poll in early September giving Dewey a 15-point lead (53 to 38 percent) and abandoned the field for the rest of the campaign in the belief that the race was over. A Gallup poll also taken in early September gave Dewey a 12-point lead (48 to 36 percent), with third-party candidate Henry Wallace at 5 percent. A later poll taken in mid-October gave Dewey a more slender lead of 46 to 40 percent with Wallace's vote taken down to 4 percent. The final Gallup poll taken on October 25 and reported in the press a few days later, gave Dewey a 5 point lead, 49 to 44 percent (or a lead very close to the one Obama now has over McCain). In the final results, Truman won by 5 points nationally, 50 to 45 percent.

The Gallup organization also conducted surveys in each of the 50 states on the basis of which George Gallup, in an article published in the *Washington Post* on October 29, predicted that Dewey would win 363 electoral votes and President Truman 140 (with a few states too close to allocate). According to his estimates, Dewey was ahead by 10 points in Illinois, 7 points in California, 11 points in Ohio, 15 points in both Iowa and Wisconsin, and 7 points in Massachusetts. Truman carried every one of these states (narrowly) in the election, for a swing of 116 electoral votes in his favor.

Fortunately for his campaign, McCain does not trail by so large a margin as that which Humphrey and Ford had to overcome. Indeed, McCain's challenge is not dissimilar to that which faced Truman in the final weeks of the 1948 campaign.

Truman, confident of a victory, ridiculed the pollsters in the final days of the election. "You can throw the Gallup poll right in the ashcan," he said, adding that "there will be more red-faced pollsters on November 3 than there were in 1936 when they had to fold up *The Literary Digest*." The day after the election, the *New York Times*, in vindication of Truman's forecast, published an article under the headline, "Election Prophets Ponder in Dismay," in which the heads of the leading polling organizations acknowledged that they did not pick up the late trend in favor of Truman. Polling experts learned from harsh experience that, in order to forecast accurate results, they had to continue taking surveys right up to Election Day.

Truman succeeded in gaining ground on Dewey by casting himself as an aggressive alternative to his cool and detached opponent who seemed to be coasting to the finish in the belief that his election was a foregone conclusion. Truman encouraged his supporters by telling them over and over again that he was going to win the election, notwithstanding what the polls and editorial pages were saying. He did not attack Dewey personally so much as he ridiculed the "no good 80th Congress" which (he claimed) took sides in favor of business against labor unions. Humphrey and Ford rallied in the closing weeks of the 1968 and 1976 elections by raising doubts about the character or competence of their opponents. Both, however, were so far behind when they launched their rallies that they could never quite erase their disadvantages.

Fortunately for his campaign, McCain does not trail by so large a margin as that which Humphrey and Ford had to overcome. Indeed, McCain's challenge is not dissimilar to that which faced Truman in the final weeks of the 1948 campaign—that is, overcoming a 5-point or so lead against a relatively unknown and aloof opponent who seems assured of victory. McCain, like Truman, is burdened by an unpopular administration of his own party, though, in contrast to Truman, he has some chance of disassociating himself from it. Somewhat like Truman in 1947 and 1948, McCain has been preoccupied with foreign policy at a time when economic issues have seized the headlines. Many pundits in 1948 said that the New Deal era was about to end, just as some have said recently that the Reagan-Thatcher era will soon be over. Truman proved the pundits wrong in 1948, and there remains a slender chance that McCain might do so again in 2008. ♦

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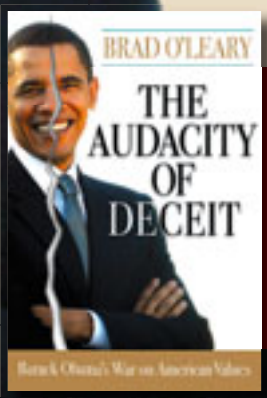

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Are Universities Above the Law?

For the sake of liberal education they shouldn't be.

BY PETER BERKOWITZ

Three lawsuits—against Dartmouth College and Duke and Princeton universities—may be the best things to happen to higher education in decades. The Dartmouth suit, though recently withdrawn, focused attention on the role of alumni in college affairs. The Duke case raises the question of the extent to which courts will require universities to observe their own rules and regulations. The Princeton case puts at issue the enforceability of restricted gifts. All three expose the often opaque governing structures under which colleges and universities operate and bring into focus the need for transparency and accountability in higher education.

More than the scope of universities' legal responsibilities is at stake here. That's because upholding the rule of law on campus can contribute to the reform of university governance—and the reform of university governance is an indispensable precondition for the restoration of a liberal education worthy of the name.

Association of Alumni of Dartmouth College v. *Trustees of Dartmouth College*, filed in the autumn of 2007 by the association's executive committee, sought to prevent college president James Wright, his administration, and the eight "charter trustees"—a self-perpetuating, life-tenure, insider group—from packing the college's board of trustees with friendly members. The board-packing scheme, plaintiffs contended, violated an 1891 written agreement on the basis of which, for over a century, the board had selected half the trustees (the "charter" trustees) and Dartmouth alumni had elected half. By diluting elected-alumni representation on the board, the administration aimed to discourage others from following in the footsteps of Silicon Valley entrepreneur T.J. Rogers, Hoover Institution fellow Peter Robinson, George Mason law professor Todd Zywicki, and University of Virginia law professor Steven Smith. Over the last few years, all ran successful write-in candidacies for election to the board of trustees on platforms—apparently regarded by the Dartmouth administration as subversive—calling on the college to protect campus freedom of speech, preserve high intellectual standards, and keep the emphasis at Dartmouth on undergraduate education.

Unfortunately, soon after the association survived Dartmouth's motion to dismiss the lawsuit (in which the court found that plaintiffs stated a legitimate contractual cause of action) in February 2008, the college administration mounted an unscrupulous campaign on behalf of new candidates to the association's executive committee. For example, the administration refused to allow the alumni-elected trustees to use the same email and mailing lists that the administration used to attack them, thereby inhibiting the free flow of information and contaminating the election. In June, the administration-backed slate won. Within weeks of gaining control of the Association of Alumni's executive committee, the newcomers withdrew the lawsuit. Since the administration had blocked the elected-alumni trustees from disseminating their views, it would be unfair to conclude that a majority of Dartmouth alumni prefer a board of trustees that is neither accountable to them nor inclined to demand that the college administration safeguard the principles of liberal education. But such a board of trustees is what Dartmouth has now got.

The Duke case—*Edward Carrington, et al.* v. *Duke University, et al.*—grows out of the notorious lacrosse scandal of 2006. It implicates matters that go directly to crucial questions of university governance.

In February, 38 Duke lacrosse players not indicted in 2006 and several family members sued the university, along with Duke's president, provost, dean of students, and deputy general counsel, in federal court. The plaintiffs, represented by, among others, Washington lawyer Charles Cooper, seek damages for the infliction of emotional distress, fraud, invasion of privacy, breach of contract, tortious breach of contract, and other injuries connected, they contend, to Duke's mishandling of the false accusations of rape against three team members and the city of Durham's corrupt indictment of those three. (Having been proclaimed innocent by North Carolina's attorney general in April 2007 and having seen Durham district attorney Mike Nifong disgraced and disbarred, the indicted players have settled separately with Duke but are pursuing a civil lawsuit against Durham.)

The gravamen of the unindicted lacrosse players' complaint is that "Throughout the crisis, Richard Brodhead (the President of the University) and other Duke officials consistently sacrificed the rights and interests of the accused Duke students in an effort to avoid embarrassment to Duke and to minimize criticism of its administration." The lacrosse players allege that, in violation of the university's own published antiharassment policies, Brodhead suppressed, discredited, and ignored exculpatory evidence; looked on passively as faculty and students conducted a campaign of harassment against the lacrosse players; and issued public statements and imposed disciplinary measures that were calculated "to impute guilt to

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the players and further inflame public opinion against them."

In late May, Duke University, represented by, among others, Washington lawyer Jamie Gorelick, filed a brief in support of its motion to dismiss, in which it contended that under North Carolina law student bulletins and faculty handbooks do not form enforceable contracts, and even if they do it is up to Duke to judge when the requirements of academic freedom override the promises made in them. To which the unindicted lacrosse players reply that Duke did indeed have a contractual obligation to "implement and enforce" the policies and protections outlined in its undergraduate student bulletin and faculty handbook; that such an obligation is confirmed by the very cases that Duke cites against the proposition; and that the lacrosse players' complaint raises no significant issues of academic judgment.

Courts are generally and properly reluctant to consider claims that involve a university's exercise of academic judgment—should a student have received an A or B? Did Professor Jones deserve promotion? But courts in general and North Carolina courts in particular have shown themselves prepared to examine whether universities have complied with specific promises, particularly where those promises do not implicate strictly academic judgments. This is the situation in the Duke case. Whether Duke published explicit promises in its student bulletin and faculty handbook to protect students from harassment and, in the event of serious accusations against them, to provide them a presumption of innocence and procedural rights guaranteeing a fair disciplinary process is a factual question, not one depending for its answer on academic training or expertise. So is the question whether Duke could have reasonably expected the students and their parents (who are paying upwards of $50,000 a year in tuition, room, and board) to rely on those promises.

Certainly courts will best serve universities' larger mission—the creation of a community devoted to the transmission of knowledge and the pursuit of truth—by compelling them to honor their formal promises of impartial treatment and their specific guarantees of fair process for students and professors alike. To hold otherwise would be to set universities above the law, transform administrators into dictators whose will on campus is the final word, and thereby undermine the rights on which the free and open exchange of opinion depends.

The lawsuit brought in New Jersey state court by lead plaintiff William Robertson, a Robertson Foundation trustee, against Princeton University in July 2002, is, after almost seven years, slated to go to trial on January 20, 2009. *William Robertson, et al.* v. *Princeton University, et al.* is a "donor intent" case of unprecedented magnitude. It threatens to cost the university an enormous sum: As of August 2008 the Robertson Foundation's endowment was worth approximately $900 million, which, at the time, represented about

Members of the Duke lacrosse team, January 2007

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6.5 percent of the university's $13.5 billion endowment.

William's father and mother, Charles and Marie Robertson, established the foundation in 1961 with a $35 million grant, then the largest gift by a private individual to a university. Charles, Princeton class of '26, served as the foundation's first chairman until his death in 1981. The 1961 certificate of incorporation provides for the foundation's board to be made up of three trustees designated by the Robertson family and four trustees designated by Princeton University, including Princeton's president. The foundation's purpose, according to the certificate of incorporation, is to support programs at Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs for students pursuing government careers, particularly in international relations.

The lawsuit alleges, among other things, that Princeton violated the gift's terms by surreptitiously using hundreds of millions of dollars of Robertson Foundation funds for a variety of matters, including building construction and faculty and graduate student support in diverse academic disciplines that have little or nothing to do with the gift's original purpose. The plaintiffs, Robertson family members who select family trustees and serve as family trustees, are asking the court to sever the foundation's relationship to Princeton and allow them to redirect foundation funds to programs at other universities, to be used, as originally intended, to train students for careers in government with a focus on foreign affairs. In its filings, Princeton acknowledges that it has a legal obligation to honor the 1961 agreement but contends that its expenditures have been consistent with the Robertson Foundation's purposes broadly construed.

Complicating matters is that, in contrast to the Duke case, resolving these issues involves a significant element of academic judgment: Whether or not particular expenditures by Princeton—on student fellowships, courses, research projects, faculty salaries, physical infrastructure, and so on—reflect the donor's intent depends on what sorts of academic priorities advance the donor's goals. But as the New Jersey court has recognized in rejecting Princeton's seven year effort to have the lawsuit thrown out, while courts are rightly reluctant to substitute their judgment on *purely* academic matters for the judgment of university administrators and professors, courts, in the course of upholding the law, can no more *entirely* avoid judgments that touch on academic issues than can courts enforcing employment contracts in the telecommunications business entirely avoid judgments about science and technology.

At the heart of the Robertson Foundation case is the integrity of restricted gifts. These enable private individuals to promote diversity and innovation in higher education by encouraging worthy but neglected paths of study and sponsoring fruitful avenues of inquiry that reigning orthodoxies undervalue or suppress. Provided that universities properly review the terms and goals, restricted gifts—which universities are always at liberty to decline—not only pose no intrinsic threat to academic freedom but can enhance it by supporting important but unpopular or disfavored courses of study.

The predictable criticism that lawsuits like these menace university autonomy is wrongheaded. Universities should not be law-free zones. By demanding that universities conform to the regulations they set for themselves and abide by generally applicable laws, the 2007 executive committee of Dartmouth's alumni association, the Duke lacrosse players, and William Robertson and his family members are defending the conditions that are indispensable to conserving intellectual freedom and fostering liberal education on our campuses. ♦

The Doleful State of Liddy's Race

Another red state cliffhanger.

BY MARY KATHARINE HAM

Raleigh, N.C.

Senator Elizabeth Dole breezed into the lobby of the Raleigh Marriott on October 15 after a day of crisscrossing the state, greeting surprised voters as she made her way to the elevator. In tow was not an entourage but an ever-present garment bag and a selection of colorful suits—a testament to the unpredictability of the campaign trail, and the humidity of her home state.

It was 80 degrees in the Sandhills when Dole addressed a small crowd at a bed-and-breakfast in Ellerbe, N.C. (pop. 1,068) earlier in the week, telling them about a time her hanging bag had served her well. She was at an event with the motorcycle club Rolling Thunder and declared her desire to ride on the back of one of the Harleys.

The event staff lectured her about liability, but she was insistent, and went to change into a pantsuit.

"I didn't have one, but I had a suit with a wide skirt," she said as she laughed about looks from people who realized it was Dole on the back of a bike. "You see, with that skirt, I was showing quite a bit of leg!"

On the campaign trail, Dole is pol-

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ished and feminine, the softness of her Salisbury accent and southern manners still evident after a career in Washington's hard corridors, and the "Dole Stroll" is relaxed, as she moves like a talk show host in and around her audience.

But the state of North Carolina, no stranger to tough, expensive, close Senate races, is not about to let Liddy Dole glide to reelection without a fight. In 2002, she earned the endorsement of her predecessor, Jesse Helms, upon his retirement from the Senate, and she toured the state as a celebrity before her 8-point win over former Clinton White House chief of staff Erskine Bowles. In the process, the campaigns spent upwards of $13 million apiece. But favorite-daughter status has not been enough to keep Dole's upstart opponent, Kay Hagan, from painting her as an absentee, out of touch and ineffective. In both Washington and in the Tar Heel State, Republicans have pegged Dole's as perhaps the most important seat to keep to prevent a Democratic supermajority in the Senate.

Hagan, a lawyer and 10-year state senator who sat on the budget committee, is up 3.4 points in the Real Clear Politics poll average—a substantial shift since August when the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC) began an $8 million TV campaign on her behalf.

"I'm not really running against Kay," Dole said. "I'm running against Chuck [Schumer]."

Hagan, recruited by Schumer to run for the seat when other prominent state Democrats demurred in the face of Dole's popularity, effectively undermined Dole's image in the month before the economic crisis took hold of the headlines. Since then, the news has been worse for Dole. She has trailed in all three Rasmussen polls conducted after the collapse of Lehman Brothers set off a global financial panic.

A quirky DSCC ad featuring two codgers in rocking chairs has been the most talked-about ad of the cycle, as the two argue over whether Liddy Dole is "92 or 93." The figures ostensibly represent the percentage of the time she has voted with Bush and her effectiveness rating (i.e., 93rd out of 100 senators), but that's not how many interpret them. "Here's one way to go after a candidate's age," wrote Ben Smith of the *Politico*, noting that Dole is one month older than John McCain.

"I think it was very unfair in many respects," Dole said of the ad. "But you don't let these things get you hung up."

Dole has thrown some of her own money into the race. The investment, she says, shows she "cares enough to put some skin in the game." Andy Taylor, a political science professor at N.C. State University, thinks the Dole campaign has had trouble countering the charge that she's ineffective until her latest round of ads. "Given that the prevailing winds are behind the backs of Democrats anyway," Dole is "in a heap of trouble," he says.

On the stump, Dole focuses on her work for North Carolina in the Senate, sometimes lacing her sentences with one too many Washington acronyms for an incumbent running in a change election, but she usually corrects herself quickly. She touts her 2005 cosponsorship of a bill that would have subjected Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to stricter regulation, which elicits applause and "Amens."

Elizabeth Dole with Stormy, mascot of the Carolina Hurricanes hockey team, in Raleigh, October 10, 2008

JASON ARTHURS / RALEIGH NEWS & OBERVER / MCT

She tells of chasing fellow Republican Charles Grassley of Iowa to the airport to woo him on the 2004 tobacco quota buyout, an economic boon to North Carolina farmers that Obama surrogates in the state have hammered John McCain for opposing. Securing funding for immigration enforcement and textile import regulation are crowd pleasers.

She leaves her attacks mostly for her ads, which started in September. Dole's ads dub Hagan "Fibber Kay" and point out that state debt doubled while she was writing the budget, that she voted for state tax hikes, and that she has repeatedly dodged questions on contentious issues like offshore drilling.

The Dole campaign has declined

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to try to connect Hagan with a wave of corruption in the state Democratic party, which culminated in former house speaker Jim Black being thrown in prison for offering bribes for votes and accepting illegal donations.

Republican gubernatorial candidate Pat McCrory has used the scandals to his advantage in taking on Lieutenant Governor Bev Perdue and leads that race by several points. Republican general assembly candidates are also benefiting. McCrory's rise and Dole's struggle illustrate the political complications of a state with significant population growth, fairly evenly split between the left-leaning highly educated voters of its metro areas and the right-leaning churchgoing voters of its rural areas. Barack Obama's and Hagan's leads here suggest the state may be poised to reverse a trend of voting Republican in national elections and Democrat in state elections, says John Hood, head of the John Locke Foundation, a free-market think tank based in Raleigh.

"Dole needs to reintroduce herself to voters," says Hood, many of whom are new to the state and know her as the head of the National Republican Senatorial Committee's unsuccessful efforts in 2006, not as a hometown girl. New independent voters are the ones Dole's in danger of losing, Hood says. North Carolina has added about 200,000 independent voters this year, according to the state board of elections.

A new ad, in which Dole speaks directly to the camera outside her family home about her work on Fannie/Freddie legislation, offshore drilling, and tax reduction showcases the strategy for the homestretch. In the waning days, if it looks like John McCain will lose the state, Dole could argue to independent voters that she is standing between them and powerful one-party rule in Washington, Hood says.

"She's in a dogfight here, but it's not as though she's in the Last Chance Saloon and she's gotta gamble," Taylor said. "She's gotta emphasize the fact that she's an effective senator. She hopes that if Obama wins in North Carolina, he has short coattails." ♦

Nicholas Sarkozy hectors President Dmitry Medvedev about Russia's invasion of Georgia.

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Old Europe, New Europe

Red Europe, blue Europe.

BY SETH CROPSEY

The division of Europe into "old" and "new" parallels the blue and red state split of American electoral politics. In the Old Europe—synonymous with Western—defense and foreign policy thinkers and officials tend to see Barack Obama as a ray of hope for an America that reaches out in benevolent acceptance of European attitudes toward peace and how to achieve it around the world. In the New Europe—read Central and Eastern—men and women with the same expertise and official responsibility regard the possible election of Obama with deep concern. They worry about whether he can deal purposefully with Russia, about whether he instinctively grasps the importance to the West of an effective alliance, and about his ability to provide effective leadership at a time when so little is to be found in Europe and so much is expected from the United States.

Western Europeans see threats to their security in climate change, human trafficking, and a nuisance level of terror. They no longer think of NATO as an important club since their part of the world seems benign, nonthreatening, and assured of continued invulnerability so long as multilateral organizations can restrain the fitful compulsions of the American

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electorate. The Central and Eastern European states, on the other hand, see NATO and its security guarantees as inseparable from their continued independence. Even those who don't view Russia's invasion of Georgia as a return to military competition still see a growing threat from Moscow as it combines its energy resources with an aggressive foreign policy.

Germany is at the center of Western Europe's strategic blindness. Surrounded by pliant neighbors and reminders of past horrors, Germans are strongly motivated to avoid any repetition of such calamities. Placing their trust in multilateralism, further European integration, and a proto-Kantian expectation that the universal embrace of pacifism will unite the international community, they hope for nothing more than the benefits of a continued and expanding welfare state. The outside world has been reduced to a judgment of its immediate effects on domestic comfort. The editor of a large northern German newspaper observed to me, following the Georgian invasion, that his countrymen were less anxious about tensions with Russia than they were about the chance that such tensions could lead to a cutoff of Russia's oil and gas. (Russia supplies nearly 40 percent of Germany's oil and 43 percent of its natural gas.)

For Germans, a strategic partnership with Russia is good because it assures the energy supply. Strategic association with NATO is bad as it requires onerous defense expenditures, participation in distant missions, and association with the United States. Seventy percent of the public, according to a poll taken this year, object to Germany's noncombat participation in NATO's mission in Afghanistan. A German political expert I spoke with in August warned that if Berlin's popular mayor, Klaus Wowereit, and his coalition were to succeed on a national level, it might lead to German withdrawal from NATO. A German defense intellectual remarked to me that "people say that Germany is no longer a reliable ally. I can't blame them."

The weight of history presses with less violence on French public opinion, but the end result is not profoundly different. Increased European integration is the goal of France's external policies. In June, Nicolas Sarkozy did announce France's return to NATO, but that was only made possible by the alliance's new arrangement that "the mission determines the coalition," i.e., that NATO members are free to decide whether they want to participate in alliance missions. This was exactly what de Gaulle wanted back in 1966 when he withdrew France from NATO.

France is also shrinking an already small military, and the French public is far from supportive of military missions. As a professor at the University of Paris put it, "living standards are in trouble here because of the inability to control welfare expenses along with the spiraling costs of just about everything. This and only this is what people are concerned about, not security and surely not France's place in the world." As in Germany, there are loud public doubts about the American character, which raise serious questions about the ability of France and the United States to find agreement on future questions of common security. "What kind of people," asks a senior writer for the *Nouvel Observateur*, "could elect George W. Bush twice?"

Europe is as divided over the American election as it is over whether it faces serious external threats. French foreign policy and defense intellectuals openly admire Obama. One explained that his election would return the United States to "decency."

Central and Eastern Europeans exhibit none of this strategic blindness nor the suspicion that America represents a threat to democracy and every other international good. A senior Polish diplomat told me that the United States should "stop tip-toeing around the Russians and end NATO's charade of political correctness in dealing with Moscow." Another saw "ominous consequences" in Russia's invasion of Georgia and argued that his nation needed to reconsider NATO's emphasis on expeditionary forces in favor of beefing up its own defenses against Russian forces. "The Russians," argued this experienced official, "have decided that the reassertion of great power status is more important than integration with the West." A Hungarian official similarly warned that "the new Russian imperialism has become a reality." He cautioned that if Russian policy succeeds in its traditional aim of dividing Europe, "you can say bye-bye to NATO."

Europe is as divided over the current American presidential election as it is over whether it faces serious external threats. French foreign policy and defense intellectuals openly admire Obama. One explained that his election would return the United States to "decency." A former national-level German politician argued that the United States "must reinvent itself in order to survive" and that Obama is the only one who can accomplish this.

Central and Eastern Europeans do not share this enthusiasm. They are more skeptical than enchanted. Poles ask about Obama's track record on Russia and his understanding of Central Europe's importance to the Atlantic alliance. They question whether his opposition to the surge in Iraq would find a parallel reluctance to take risks in defense of their own countries. They wonder, as a venerable and experienced Romanian government leader politely put it, "Who is Obama?"

In McCain, Old Europe sees a toughness and worldview inconsistent with its hopes for multilateral resolutions to international problems. New Europe sees the same qualities in McCain, but approves of them as appropriate to the world the next American president will face. One must judge for oneself which part of Europe sees the world as it is. ♦

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Is the Era of Big Government Back?

Don't bet on it.

BY WILLIAM J. STUNTZ

If the pundit class is right, Americans are in for another era of big government: the New Deal on steroids. In presidential debates, hundreds of billions of dollars in proposed spending were tossed around the way mere billions once were. Within a year of our first half-trillion-dollar deficit, we might see our first—wait for it—*trillion*-dollar deficit. We seem on the verge of socializing both health care and the credit market.

But I'm starting to wonder whether the commentary has it backwards. In a socialized credit market, the government displaces banks. Governments around the world, including our own, are trying desperately to do the opposite: to induce banks to displace the government as the system's leading lender. Plus, nationalizing the banks would require permanent institutional change. Every bailout and rescue package that we've seen over the past few weeks, and every one we will see over the next few months—no matter who wins in November—screams "temporary." The packages are designed to put lots of government money into the credit system now, and to remove as much of it as possible as soon as possible. The New Dealers liked programs with a longer shelf life.

As for more New Dealish issues like health care, I wouldn't bet the ranch on radical change there either—even if November produces a Democratic sweep. The reason is simple: The government doesn't have the money.

In a recession, federal revenues will fall, and fall sharply. Capital gains tax revenues will plummet, as will revenues from the corporate income tax. Individual income taxes at the high end—which is where most income tax revenue is realized—will fall too, and substantially: Highly paid professionals can see their pay fall as well as rise. The once-hot issue of out-of-control CEO pay will fade, along with CEO paychecks. Payroll tax revenues will fall as unemployment rises.

In a socialized credit market, the government displaces banks. Governments around the world, including our own, are trying desperately to do the opposite: to induce banks to displace the government as the system's leading lender.

Readers might think: So what? We've run huge deficits before, and they haven't produced catastrophe. Why not run even bigger ones for awhile? There are two answers. First, "awhile" means "permanently," given that the already-mentioned half-trillion dollar deficit is mostly structural: Deficits of that size (and larger) will recur even in reasonably good economic times, unless spending is cut dramatically or taxes are raised substantially. And no, you can't get the needed revenue by raising taxes on the rich; you have to squeeze the entire top half of the income spectrum to do the job. As between that and spending cuts—including modest cuts in Social Security benefits (say, indexing for price increases rather than wage increases and a further phased-in increase in the retirement age)—spending cuts will prove more politically saleable.

Second, save for the last years of World War II, we haven't run huge deficits at a time when the debt-to-GDP ratio was as high as it is today. And World War II isn't comparable, since it was bound to end within a few years, after which a large fraction of the required spending would end as well. Running massive deficits in our circumstances risks creating federal budgets the majority of which cover interest on the growing federal debt—year in, year out for the indefinite future. Eventually, that leads to one of three things: politically suicidal tax hikes, substantial cuts in federal spending, or the large-scale printing of money to lower the debt's value. To get a picture of the last option, think Germany in 1923, when wheelbarrows full of nearly worthless marks were used to pay for the day's groceries. German hyperinflation started as a means of paying off postwar reparations—debts that seemed too high to pay with honest money. Sound familiar?

That is the true big-government option for America's economic policymakers. I doubt that even Robert Reich would go for it.

Any way you slice it, the answer is the same, and it applies regardless of which party is in power. Unless middle-income Americans are sold on the idea that their taxes should be not just higher but *much* higher, we are entering the Age of Spending Restraint. Not the Age of the Federal Checkbook, and certainly not the Age of American Socialism. Whatever he says in the midst of his campaign, the next president is more likely to be a twenty-first-century Calvin Coolidge than an up-to-date FDR.

That era of small government you never saw? It may be coming, and soon—perhaps sponsored by a Democratic president and a Democratic Congress, with a large dose of bipartisan cooperation thrown in for good measure. Now that's change worth hoping for. ♦

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The Best Are Yet to Come

Obama's retrograde position on skills-based immigration. BY SAHIL MAHTANI & PIERPAOLO BARBIERI

Former Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan recently suggested that an increase in the influx of skilled immigrants would help arrest the steep decline in housing prices in the last two quarters. Since skilled immigrants tend to form new households relatively rapidly, their arrival in growing numbers would quicken the sale of existing housing inventory and in doing so stabilize prices.

Raising the share of visas that go to educated immigrants is an idea that ought to be getting a hearing in the presidential campaign, all the more since it is one on which the candidates disagree. While John McCain and Barack Obama both supported last year's immigration bill, agreeing on amnesty and border security, they were pointedly at odds over whether U.S. policy should continue to prioritize family reunification above the admission of immigrants with economically desirable skills. Last year's bill would have introduced a point system, under which possession of valuable skills would have weighed heavily in a visa applicant's favor, overturning the strong bias of current law in favor of family members, including those beyond the immediate family.

This is one instance where McCain is the candidate of change, applauding a point system designed to orient immigration toward national needs. Obama, by contrast, proposed an amendment adding a sunset provision that would have ended the point system after five years.

Sahil Mahtani is a reporter-researcher at the New Republic. *Pierpaolo Barbieri is a senior at Harvard College.*

Obama offered several arguments in favor of the status quo. He cited tradition: "How many of our forefathers would have measured up under this point system?" he asked in a speech on the Senate floor. "How many would have been turned back at Ellis Island?" He cited Americans' respect for family. A skills-based system, he said, "does not reflect how much Americans value the family ties that bind people to their brothers and sisters or to their parents." And he warned against a "radical experiment in social engineering." But none of these objections bears much scrutiny.

Raising the share of visas that go to educated immigrants is an idea that ought to be getting a hearing in the presidential campaign, all the more since it is one on which the candidates disagree. Here, McCain is the candidate of change.

Whatever their rhetorical power, Obama's invocation of "our forefathers" and his historical analogy to Ellis Island are both anachronistic and misleading. During the great immigration wave of the late 19th and early 20th century, manufacturing was at the cutting-edge of the American economy and demanded multitudes of unskilled workers. Skills mattered less than sheer ability to work. The situation these days is different; employment has shifted from industry to services, and fewer than 10 percent of American workers are employed in manufacturing. Today, innovation and technological expertise are in high demand—and both require advanced-degree holders in numbers that exceed the output of U.S. higher education. Extending visas to foreigners who already have the requisite skills and degrees would contribute to a virtuous cycle of higher GDP and higher tax revenues, translating into a better quality of life for the average American.

Obama's point about family values is similarly misleading. His nightmare scenario of parents or children of U.S. citizens being turned away at the border is unreal. Under most plans being considered, immediate family members—that is, parents, siblings, and children—would still get a leg up, if not a free pass for entry. The people newly downgraded under a point system would be more distant relatives—and unless the United States is to admit everybody, lines have to be drawn somewhere.

As to the charge of "radical social engineering," it is difficult to understand what Obama means by it. The point system is not "radical" in the sense of being new or untested; Canada and Australia have had such a system for 40 years and by all accounts have profited from it. And any immigration system is a form of "social engineering," in that choosing whom to admit and whom to exclude will affect the shape of a society in the long run. Obama's preference for admitting both immediate and extended family members is every bit as much "social engineering" as any other set of priorities—except that he is the engineer and the ends chosen are his.

As a matter of fact, our current arrangement is already radical. If in 1965 Americans had been told that a new U.S. immigration law would spark the arrival of tens of millions of people from Asia, Africa, and South America with the effect of greatly altering our ethnic composition, there would certainly have been more opposition than there was to the immigration reform of that year—which ended country-of-origin quotas and instituted unlimited family-reuni-

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fication visas. Yet the results of that sweeping liberalization are now the starting point for any new reform.

In particular, family immigration has a strong lobby in the large Latino community, which depends mostly on the Democratic party to push its agenda. A President Obama would likely toe the Democratic line on unskilled immigration and, working with a Democratic Congress, would easily stall reforms to fix a broken immigration system. This at a time when Britain and the European Union are moving in precisely the opposite direction, joining Canada and Australia in using a point system weighted towards the admission of people with skills.

Britain made the move earlier this year, for the same reasons of national interest that were well expressed decades back by a speaker during the 1966 debate on the point system in the Canadian parliament:

> The trend of [economic] requirements is in the direction of higher levels of education and higher levels of skills. Now how do you want to get at this? You can bring in immigrants who are already educated and trained as much as possible, or if you want to, you can bring them in and train and educate them here. But that means you must be prepared from a social and political point of view to do this. In other words it costs money; it takes time and it requires capital.

It sounds like something Alan Greenspan might have said, and it's sound advice. If Barack Obama is serious about making immigration a "top priority," as he declared the other day, he should do it in a way that puts the country's long-run competitiveness first. ♦

Rocky Road

Plenty of obstacles for Colorado's Republicans.

BY DAVID HARSANYI

Denver

If an optimistic Republican were to sit down and fiddle around with one of those adjustable online Electoral College maps, he would quickly realize that all best-case scenarios lead to Colorado. Barack Obama, after all, needs only to successfully defend the states John Kerry claimed and add Colorado for a victory (assuming New Mexico and Iowa hold for Obama as polls indicate). Denver wasn't chosen as the site of the Democratic National Convention for the skiing.

Still, despite widespread perceptions, Colorado has not been transformed into a blue state. Not yet. Not exactly. It's what one might call chromatically confused. A condition that is attributable to the irregular political positions of the state's rather peculiar inhabitants—a place where gun-toting border-first Democrats mingle with subsidy-loving environmentalist Republicans, and independents always rule the day.

With this murky political brew in place, a statewide candidate's only hope for victory these days, it seems, is a nimble ideological approach and a malleable sense of self. Many believed that the John McCain brand of maverick populism would play nicely in Colorado. But, as nearly everywhere else in the nation, events have altered the game.

To his credit, Barack Obama's prospective success in Colorado cannot be chalked up entirely to national events. The Democrat has rarely shown any inclination to understand western issues, yet his campaign has launched a commanding and sharp ground game here, with over 20 campaign offices statewide. The McCain camp offers nothing nearly as effective.

Obama, in many ways, is simply piggybacking on success. Since 2004, Colorado Democrats have—with the help of a trio of deep pockets that bolster progressive causes big and small—been able to snatch both houses of the legislature, the governorship, and one Senate seat. They don't deserve all the credit, of course. Pitiable leadership and factional wars between fiscal conservatives and moderate Republicans have critically eroded party unity.

Republicans may already be losing the presidential election. According to a recent study by the *Denver Post*, the GOP holds a 30,000-voter edge in requests for mail-in ballots. That sounds heartening until you realize that the overall voter-registration advantage for the party has fallen 60 percent since Bush won the state. Today, unaffiliated voters have become the state's most critical voting bloc, making up 34 percent of the 3 million registered voters, and most polls show them breaking for Obama.

Another problem for Republicans is demographics. Approximately 12 percent of Colorado voters are Latinos—the sixth-biggest Hispanic voting bloc in the nation. This is the state where Tom Tancredo is perhaps the most recognized Republican name. The most recent Quinnipiac University/*Wall Street Journal* poll, not surprisingly, shows Obama leading McCain in Colorado among Latino voters 68 percent to 26 percent.

The overriding question for any politician in Colorado is how to appeal to this motley ideological mix. Most practice a western brand of avoidance politics (sometimes confused with moderation). The most famous practitioners have been Democrats like Senator Ken Salazar and Governor Bill Ritter, elected officials whose main objective, it seems, is to avoid any appearance of a spine. If there is a gang to join in Washington, join it. If you can equivocate on a controversial issue, hedge like there's no tomorrow. If you can call forth a blue ribbon panel to delay vital decisions, order the doughnuts.

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The newest subscriber to this methodology is Democratic congressman Mark Udall. Running for the Senate against a conservative Republican, former congressman Bob Schaffer, Udall has fended off his own liberal image, despite his long history of progressive representation for his district. (Colorado Republican chairman Dick Wadhams refused to utter Udall's name in public without prefixing it with the pejorative "Boulder liberal.") And polls have consistently shown a decent lead for the Democrat.

The general feeling among politicos is that Schaffer remains "too conservative for Colorado." Considering his positions are no more ideologically fringy than Udall's, this contention is perception rather than reality. Most likely the relentless barrage of attacks on "Big Oil Schaffer" and the floating of unsubstantiated accusations of corruption by a group of highly motivated leftwing groups have left their mark. Similar campaigns aimed at Udall by out-of-state groups have been far less successful.

Udall has displayed few qualms about customizing his positions to appeal to any audience that happens to be listening. He has taken U-turns on offshore drilling (literally inserting it into an existing commercial on energy) and nuclear power. He flipped and voted for a FISA bill that included retroactive immunity for telecommunication companies. He voted against the financial bailout (twice) and has newfound appreciation for the Second Amendment. While Salazar perfected the bolo-tied cowboy populist charmer shtick, Udall, a prodigy from a well-known political family, brings the newer template: the mountain-climbing, granola-crunching, wind-worn man of the West.

Schaffer has struggled to match this appeal. Meeting recently with the *Denver Post* editorial board (which endorsed Udall and of which I am a member), he contrasted himself with his opponent saying, "You always know where I stand on an issue." And, well, that's the problem. Voters' knowing where you stand doesn't get you elected.

Though it might be too late for Schaffer to mount a comeback against these forces, McCain needs a Colorado miracle to compete. The Centennial State has not voted for a Democratic presidential candidate in 16 years, and then only with the help of Ross Perot. Colorado is a microcosm of the troubles Republicans face. The party has been unable to find top-notch candidates, generate grassroots enthusiasm, raise money, and deal with Colorado's changing demographics.

A recent *New Yorker* article entitled "The Code of the West—What Barack Obama can learn from Bill Ritter" stated that party insiders "have decided growth for Democrats is more likely to occur in the conservative but idiosyncratic West than in the solidly Republican South."

How Republicans regain their footing and repel this strategy is still a mystery. They certainly haven't begun to do the job yet. ♦

MICHAEL RAMIREZ

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Martin Buser races down the Yukon River near Galena, Alaska, during the 2003 Iditarod.

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The Last Frontier

In Alaska, the folks are self-reliant and prefer to take care of things themselves. No wonder they like Sarah Palin.

By Charlotte Allen

Big Lake, Alaska

Kathy Chapoton, 55, a newly retired schoolteacher, and her Swiss-born husband, Martin Buser, 50, live in a 3,000-square-foot, two-story house on a lot carved out of the forest in this unincorporated community of 3,500 in Alaska's Matanuska-Susitna Valley (Mat-Su, for short) just north of Wasilla, the now-famous home of Alaska's governor, Sarah Palin. With its open-plan spaciousness, its birch-laminate floors, its tasteful array of lived-in furniture and houseplants that bespeak middle-class comfort but not opulence, its large wood-framed windows that look out to vistas of towering spruce and birch trees, the Chapoton-Buser residence might appear at first glance as though it could be located in any woodsy large-lot suburb or second-home enclave in America: in Vermont, on the San Francisco peninsula,

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Martin Buser and Kathy Chapoton

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Chapoton and Buser spent part of their first six years together in Alaska living in a 'tiny little cabin' (Chapoton's words) on their property and later in their 900-square-foot basement while they built the house above them, doing without running water, shooting their food, and relying on a wood stove for heating.

in the horse-filled exurbs of greater Washington, D.C.

Then you see the dogs. Some 80-odd sled dogs, each tethered by a long chain to its individual kennel, seem to occupy the entire middle distance between the triple-paned picture windows in the living room-dining room and the gorgeous landscape beyond. Some of the dogs look like lean, half-grown versions of the fluffy, blue-eyed Siberian huskies that are common pets in the lower 48 states, others like junior wolves. The compact sled dogs, weighing about 60 pounds on average, bear the generic name of Alaskan husky, but they're actually a variety of mixtures of northern canines including Siberians, malamutes, and whatever else will produce speed and endurance.

Martin Buser is an Alaska celebrity, a four-time winner of the Iditarod, the grueling late-winter Anchorage-to-Nome dogsled race. In 2002, he set a record by finishing the 1,150-odd miles in less than nine days and received his U.S. citizenship at the end of the race. A slender, blue-eyed, surprisingly youthful-looking man with a thick shock of brown hair, Buser is already training for the 2009 Iditarod this coming March. (His goal is to match the record of five-time Iditarod-winner Rick Swenson, set during the 1970s and 1980s.)

The 30 acres that Buser and his wife own in Big Lake are not only his home but also the site of his business, Happy Trails Kennel, where he raises, trains, and shows sled dogs, stages dry-land mushing demonstrations, and shares Iditarod lore with busloads of summertime tourists up from Anchorage. The dogs, some standing atop their kennels, some scrambling at the ends of their chains or skittering up and down exercise slides, were mesmerized by the sight of five humans sitting inside the house at the capacious Chapoton-Buser dining table and consuming a Sunday dinner of moose soup, Australian shiraz (purchased by me at the Fred Meyer hypermarket in Wasilla after an impromptu invitation), hot French bread, and homemade chocolate cake. The dogs were mostly silent—except when they were not. Their intermittent howls ranged from the high-pitched ululations of the contentedly fed to alarmed growls suggesting that some other needle-toothed critter, perhaps a fox, might be lurking in the Chapoton-Buser curtilage. Sled dogs are affectionate, and they warm to human companionship, but their perpetual craving for exercise makes them unsuitable as house pets. Chapoton and Buser have two dogs of conventional breed, a Jack Russell terrier and a dachshund that just had a litter of puppies.

The couple has known the Palins off and on for years. Palin's husband, Todd, once had a snow-machine repair shop in Big Lake. He and Buser became friends, and they share an identical number of victories in Alaskan big snow races (Todd Palin is a four-time winner of the Iron Dog, the 1,950-mile Wasilla-Nome-Fairbanks snow-machine race). Buser recently traveled with the Palins on the campaign trail in New England. The Buser sons, Nikolai and Rohn—now off attending the University of Washington and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute respectively—played hockey on the Wasilla High School team with the Palins' son Track.

Chapoton—a petite, rosy-cheeked, New Orleans-born woman who styles herself politically as "such a liberal" and a "bra-burner" during her college years who bought into every fish-needs-a-bicycle tenet of 1970s radical feminism—had paid little attention to Sarah Palin's career during the 1990s as a member of the Wasilla city council and then as mayor, despite numerous cordial meetings at school and community events. Then Palin in 2003, after running unsuccessfully for the Republican nomination for lieutenant governor, was appointed to the state's Oil and Gas Conservation Commission by the incoming Republican governor, Frank Murkowski. She resigned a year later and filed conflict-of-interest charges against two prominent Alaskan Republicans. One, Rudy Ruedrich, now chairman of the state GOP's central committee, was alleged to have used his state office to conduct party business and to have worked closely with a firm he was supposed to be regulating. He resigned and paid a $12,000 fine. Gregg Renkes, a former state attorney general accused of having a conflict of interest in an oil-export trade agreement he was negotiating, also resigned. In 2006, Palin defeated Murkowski in the gubernatorial primary, paving the way for her election to Alaska's highest office later that year.

"That was pretty impressive," the New Orleans-born

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Between mouthfuls of moose, Martin Buser remarked, 'A reporter asked me, "Didn't I think it was strange that there's a gun store next door to the supermarket?" To me, it seems perfectly natural.'

Chapoton said in a telephone interview afterwards about Palin's ethics-motivated forays against fellow Republicans while still a greenhorn in statewide Alaskan politics. "She was a woman, and she was new on the scene, but she did it, she took them on, and I started paying attention to her. I was a flower child—I had these peace and love attitudes in college—and my father was a union man, a welder, and no one in my family has ever voted anything except Democratic. This will be the first time in my life that I've voted for a Republican for president."

Chapoton's moose soup—actually a dense, savory stew that included barley and Alaska-grown carrots and peas—was as tasty as boeuf bourguignon. Moose meat, if properly dressed (that means dressed fast, according to Buser, who personally shot the animal we were consuming, promptly gutted it, quartered it for carrying—a moose typically weighs up to 1,200 pounds—and hauled it home), does not taste the slightest bit gamey, but rather, like a mild, extra-lean, and, when slowly braised as Chapoton's was, quite tender cut of beef.

At dinner we were joined by two young men, Sean Williams and Magnus Kaltenborn—the latter a Norwegian exchange student—who are helping Buser with training the dogs and building a second, smaller house on a high crest nearby where Chapoton and Buser want to move now that their sons are grown. The conversation turned to a popular topic in the Mat-Su Valley these days: the exotic folkways and strange attitudes of the East Coast reporters who descended in hordes in early September right after John McCain announced that Sarah Palin would be his running mate.

Typical news coverage of Wasilla, a 45-minute drive from Anchorage along the George Parks Highway, focused almost solely on what could be seen of the town while cruising at warp speed: gas stations, boarded-up strip malls from the 1970s, and the big-box stores that have clustered along the highway over the past decade thanks to property-tax reductions and infrastructure-investment during Palin's two terms as mayor. Besides the Fred Meyer, there is a Wal-Mart superstore, which in East Coast journalistic eyes is the American equivalent for tastelessness of the gold-plated 300-acre palace the Emperor Nero built for himself after he burned down Rome, and the Mug-Shot Saloon, a gray-painted wood-frame roadhouse that appeared in almost every Wasilla story in media outlets ranging from *New York* magazine to the *Guardian* to *Le Figaro*. The Mug-Shot features a "Go, Sarah, We Love You!" sign outside and barflies drinking their lunch inside. The news stories, slide shows, and video-clip voiceovers all seemed to express astonishment at the very existence of the Mug-Shot, as at Wasilla's firearms vendors, its four-wheelers, and the copious quantities of gravel (the town sits on a terminal moraine where an Ice Age glacier came to rest after pushing its way between the Talkeetna Mountains northeast of Wasilla and the Chugach range to the southeast, leaving behind numerous lakes and thousands of tons of rocks of every size).

Between mouthfuls of moose, Buser remarked, "A reporter asked me, 'Didn't I think it was strange that there's a gun store next door to the supermarket?' To me, it seems perfectly natural."

Another topic of conversation was the "End-of-the-Roaders," the Sixties types who, drawn by the state's libertarian ethos (until recently, possession of small quantities of marijuana was legal, and even now, the bars in Wasilla and some other Alaska towns stay open until 5 A.M.), drift northwards from Berkeley and Seattle and hole up in cabins amid the spruce trees hoping to find a far-northern hippie utopia. The quintessential End-of-the-Roader novel is T.C. Boyle's 2003 bestseller *Drop City*, about a busload of stoners who decamp from California to the banks of the Yukon River in 1970 and, both literally and figuratively, freeze to death. The signature End-of-the-Roader movie is Sean Penn's 2007 *Into the Wild*, narrating the real-life story of Christopher McCandless, a 24-year-old suburban Virginia idealist who wandered into the wilderness near Denali National Park without a map or compass, shot a moose but didn't know how to preserve the carcass, which promptly spoiled, and starved to death a quarter of a mile away from likely rescue. McCandless is romanticized by outsiders but not by Alas-

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kans. "Yeah, after he killed the moose, he felt sorry for it," said Williams, shaking his head.

In numerous ways Chapoton and Buser have led lives parallel to the Palins'. Like Todd Palin, Buser used to spend summers as a commercial fisherman, trawling for salmon in the Cook Inlet off Anchorage. While the Palins named their 17-year-old daughter Bristol, after Bristol Bay on the Bering Sea where the Palins fished for salmon, Chapoton and Buser named their sons Nikolai and Rohn after checkpoints on the Iditarod trail. If Sarah Palin grew up in what was virtually a one-room house in Wasilla with a wood stove for heating and whatever the family shot and caught for food, Chapoton and Buser spent part of their own first six years together in Alaska living in a "tiny little cabin" (Chapoton's words) on their property and later in their 900-square-foot basement while they built the house above them, doing without running water, shooting their food, and relying on a wood stove for heating.

The first five acres of their land, on which the house is built, came free. In 1982 Chapoton, then employed as a social worker in Girdwood, a ski-resort town 38 miles south of Anchorage, got the parcel by driving up to Big Lake on a weekend and staking it out herself with tape and a compass, so as to qualify for a homestead-like state land giveaway program. (Of Alaska's 360 million acres, only 1 million are in private ownership, with the U.S. government, the state government, and corporate entities controlled by Alaska's Eskimo and Indian populations holding the rest.) Anyone could qualify who had the gumption to walk the boundaries and the desire to make a home on property lacking electricity, plumbing, sewage disposal, roads (the house now sits on a paved road, but back then you had to hike in), or even access to water. (The couple purchased the rest of their land from neighbors over the years.) Chapoton had come to Alaska on a lark after a friend who had moved there during the pipeline-construction boom of the 1970s talked her into pulling up stakes. She met Buser in the state land office where he was contesting, with some success, a rival bid to land he had staked-out farther north. He had sled-raced in Europe and came to Alaska in 1979 to learn about the more-developed Alaskan version of the sport.

A week later, Buser showed up looking for a job at the home for troubled young people where Chapoton was working. He got hired on as a house parent, and they soon became a couple. They married in 1983. (Chapoton, who was teaching in Anchorage by then, kept her maiden name because "Buser" rhymes with "loser," and she was afraid her sixth-graders would never stop snickering.) In 1987 they moved into the cabin on Chapoton's land in Big Lake, and Buser started training dogs. "We had to lug our

Dollar and Lidia, two of Buser's sled dogs, at Happy Trail Kennel

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water up from Anchorage," recalls Chapoton, who by this time was teaching school there. "We'd get it in five-gallon jersey jugs, fill up a 55-gallon drum, and then drive it up as close as we could get to the cabin in a pickup truck and move it into the house in five-gallon batches. Then we'd move out the empty drum."

That same year Chapoton became pregnant with Nikolai, and they learned that the state would be building a road alongside their cabin, too close for the sled-dogs. So they hastily cleared a second space in the spruce forest and dug a basement for a new home in a mere 50 days. They lived in the basement for two years because of Buser's build-in-the-summer, race-in-the-winter schedule. "There we were, the two of us, plus Nikolai and a one-and-a-half-year-old baby living in 900 square feet," says Chapoton. "We heated everything on a big wood stove that we kept burning all the time. We had electricity by then, but no running water and no indoor plumbing and little breathing room. Then we got running water, but only in a hose. Six months later Martin gave me a flush toilet for Christmas. Of course you'd have to pour in water from a five-gallon bucket to make it flush." The family bathed in a sawed-off 55-gallon drum. "We'd heat up the water on the stove, and first I'd get in and then Martin," said Chapoton. "It was okay for him, but I had to go to work so I had to be clean, which was hard when you're trying to get clean in a 55-gallon drum."

Carol Kane of Big Lake

Such tales of subsistence living, which in the lower 48 states would be associated with extreme rural poverty or survivalist eccentricity—are not uncommon among Wasilla's prosperous middle class. Carol Kane, 65, a Big Lake neighbor of the Chapoton-Busers and former assistant school superintendent for the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, lived with her husband in a 900-square-foot cabin without running water for several years while they built a bigger house. "We finally had a well drilled," she told me by telephone, "but it was pretty primitive for a while."

Kristan Cole, 46, owns a real estate business in Wasilla. She grew up around the corner from Sarah Palin and her parents during the 1970s, when Wasilla, originally built for the Alaska Railroad when it was hauling gold mined in the Talkeetna Mountains, had only 400 residents. Cole was born in Kansas, but the family moved to Alaska—five children in all—after her father got a job with the railroad when she was eight. "First we moved to Whittier—it's 30 miles south of Anchorage. I went to school in a two-room schoolhouse where there were nine kids in K through 12, and my family made up three of the nine. Then we moved to the valley in 1971. Back then Wasilla consisted of one country store and one gas station. The Parks Highway wasn't built, and it was a two-hour drive to Anchorage, so we ordered our school clothes from the Sears catalogue. Food was expensive, so we had a big garden, and we grew lots of vegetables, the kind that grow in cold climates: cabbage, potatoes, broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, onions," she said. "One year our family harvested 1,200 pounds of potatoes. Every year we'd get a moose or a caribou. We'd quarter it, and my dad would set up a meat grinder in the garage, and we'd grind the meat and freeze it. It's probably difficult for outsiders to understand, but at any given time we have a two-week food supply because you never know about the weather. We have to be prepared, not as much as we used to, of course. Now, it's a lot easier to buy food and there's a lot less of that, but a lot of people in Alaska still choose to fish for halibut or salmon and go hunting, because the meat has a lot less fat and it's a healthier way of life."

"I've got 200 pounds of halibut in the freezer," added Cole, mentioning that she put together two boxes of moose meat, reindeer sausage, halibut, and king salmon as an Alaska souvenir for Greta Van Susteren when the Fox newscaster was in Wasilla as part of the September press herd.

Dan Kennedy, 51, a certified public accountant, took me in his 1992 Chevy Blazer on an enthusiastic tour of

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Palin represents a uniquely American brand of feminism, rooted in the material hardships of frontier life which demanded women not only nourish and raise their children but also do men's work because there always was so much work to be done: clear the trees or help your husband on his fishing boat.

economically mushrooming Wasilla. He showed me the row of shotguns (unloaded, he assured me) that his family (wife, also a CPA, and three teenagers) stored next to the boots and winter parkas in the mudroom of their lakefront house on the town's eastern edge. An avid outdoorsman who climbed Mt. McKinley on its difficult southern buttress, Kennedy admitted that he didn't get a moose this fall. "But my [16-year-old] daughter Rachel and I shot a couple of ducks from our porch yesterday, and we had them for dinner with merlot—delicious."

Not long after Sarah Palin's selection as the GOP's vice presidential nominee, Camille Paglia wrote an encomium to her in the web magazine *Salon*:

> The gun-toting Sarah Palin is like Annie Oakley, a brash ambassador from America's pioneer past. She immediately reminded me of the frontier women of the Western states, which first granted women the right to vote after the Civil War—long before the federal amendment guaranteeing universal woman suffrage was passed in 1919. Frontier women faced the same harsh challenges and had to tackle the same chores as men did—which is why men could regard them as equals, unlike the genteel, corseted ladies of the Eastern seaboard, which fought granting women the vote right to the bitter end.

Paglia's comparison of Alaska to the frontier West is apt. Wyoming, Utah, Idaho, and Colorado, whose terrain resembles that of Alaska, were the first to enfranchise women. So is the comparison of Palin to Annie Oakley, the legendary female sharpshooter who could slice a playing card at the thin edge from 30 paces. Oakley, like Palin, was deeply religious and read the Bible daily. The self-confident, genially contemptuous song lyrics that Irving Berlin put into Oakley's mouth—"*Anything you can do, I can do better / I can do anything better than you*"—as she went up against her male sharpshooter competitors in *Annie Get Your Gun*, the 1946 musical based on her life, might well apply to Palin's bold forays into territories usually ruled by men, such as the Alaskan oil and gas commission.

Palin represents a uniquely American brand of feminism, rooted in the material hardships of frontier life which demanded women not only nourish and raise their children but also do men's work because there always was so much work to be done: clear the trees or help your husband on his fishing boat. It is a feminism that couldn't be more at odds with the relentlessly ideological post-1960s feminism that, paradoxically, presents women as weak and needy creatures, victims of men, who need collectivist boosts from the government in order to hold their own in a male-dominated world. Not surprisingly, Gloria Steinem, the doyenne of 1960s feminism, called Palin a tool of the "patriarchy" who had failed to make "life more fair for women everywhere."

In Alaska, there seems to be little room for perceptions of female weaknesses. The state's history abounds in stories of tough-minded women. Jean Dementi, a nurse, started running a hospital in Nenana, on the Tanana River, in 1953, after the doctor in charge walked off the job. There was no doctor anymore, so she started making the diagnoses. Or Mary Carey, another nurse and a graduate of the Yale School of Nursing, who married the famous trapper Fabian Carey in 1942 and spent three decades living with him in the woods near Manley Hot Springs, mushing alongside him to his traplines in the nearly perpetual darkness of the northern winters.

Alaskans even look different, comfortably casual in their outdoor clothes and contrasting with the Patagonia catalog victims who come up from the lower 48 wearing enough high-tech winter gear to last out a polar expedition. Alaskans really do spend a great deal of time outdoors, and the climate is serious, which weeds out those who can't take it. The winters along the coastline and even in Wasilla are relatively mild—by Alaska standards, which means that the temperature seldom dips below -20. That compares with, say, Fairbanks in Alaska's interior, where -40 is the wintry average and -60 not unknown. Winter starts early, too. By late September, the Mat-Su Valley is deep into fall, and snow is falling in Fairbanks. For maximum heat retention, the windows of Alaskan buildings, whether shacks in Fairbanks with their yard decorations of boats, scrap metal, woodpiles, and 55-gallon drums, or

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multistory office structures in downtown Anchorage, tend to be narrow and small, like slit-eyes peering into the cold.

Alaska is indescribably beautiful, with its royal blue skies and glistening snowy mountains, but the arboreal landscape looks dramatically alien. It is as though you woke up and found yourself transported to a harsher geologic age. It is hard for a visitor from the automobile-clogged Eastern Seaboard not to feel overwhelmed by the vast, forest-green swaths of emptiness and the almost vehicle-less roads.

Alaskans are quite aware that their state is like no other (they don't call it "the last frontier" for nothing). Several I talked to were eager to remind me that Alaska had practically no government of any kind from 1867 (the year of Seward's purchase) until it became a state in 1959 and that the vast bulk of Alaska's land still belongs outright to the federal government, which until recently invested almost nothing in highways or other infrastructure (one reason the Alaskans don't mind grabbing for earmarks, Bridge to Nowhere notwithstanding). They might be libertarians, but they approve of the state's quasi-socialist ownership of all subterranean oil, mineral, and gas rights (which translates into an annual royalty-like payment to each of the state's residents) and no state income or property taxes.

Many Alaskans also proudly engage in activities that are considered by many in the lower 48 to be cruel, dangerous, politically incorrect, or all three: gun-owning, hunting, trapping, riding around in snow machines. The Iditarod, for example, is anathema to People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, who say that sled-racing entails dog abuse. (I did see a P.E.T.A. bumper sticker in Alaska, but it spelled out the acronym as "People Eating Tasty Animals.") In August the Alaskan electorate voted down a ballot measure that would have banned aerial hunting of wolves (which is actually not as bad as it sounds—the hunters have to land their planes before shooting—and other mountainous states allow the practice as a form of predator control).

It is not surprising, then, that many Alaskans have a pragmatic attitude toward, say, drilling in the portion of the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge that abuts the North Slope platforms, as Sarah Palin has urged. The alternative could be an economy increasingly based on tourism: waiting for the cruise ships to dock at quaint, pretty southern coastline towns such as Sitka or Homer or Ketchikan and dreaming up summer festivals—arts, jazz, whatever—designed to keep the visitors coming. It is equally unsurprising that numerous residents of the Mat-Su Valley find the distinctly un-quaint Wasilla that Sarah Palin helped bring into being to their liking.

"In all honesty, Wasilla never was much," said Judy Patrick, a photographer specializing in taking pictures of North Slope drilling sites. Patrick, a Southern California native, has lived in Wasilla since 1981 and served on the city council under Palin during the 1990s. "It was laid out by the railroad, and the lots were pitifully small and useless. Then you've got two lakes, the railroad itself, and a highway. There's not much you can do. It seems to be the Alaska way—one building here, then something else over there. You should see Barrow."

"There are 7,000 people living in Wasilla, but it services about 50,000," Dianne Keller, who succeeded Palin as the town's mayor, told me in an interview in her office. "Some people come from as far as Valdez." Wasilla collects a 2.5 percent sales tax from this activity that has enabled it nearly to eliminate property taxes and still take in about $30 million in revenue last year, including a small percentage of federal and state grants. Keller pointed out that Wasilla's nearest neighbor, Palmer, county seat of the Mat-Su Borough and boasting a historic district, boutiques, and Democrats (it was one of the few places in Alaska where I saw Obama bumper stickers), had vetoed a Wal-Mart. "That's all right with us," said Keller. "Their people just come over here to shop."

Such attitudes might be one reason Alaskans have consistently given Sarah Palin high approval ratings. Up in Big Lake, Kathy Chapoton gave another, something she had been thinking about since 1996, when a forest fire burned for a week, destroying 300 homes in the immediate area. The Forest Service had ordered all residents to evacuate, but Chapoton and Buser along with several neighbors defied the order and worked together to save their homes by hosing them down day and night. The electricity went out, and a friend rushed over a borrowed generator on his four-wheeler, chased by a state trooper. Buser had been a volunteer fireman, so he and another friend went over to a fire station and drove an unused fire truck through the station's locked door and up to the house.

"Everybody who stayed at their houses saved their houses," said Chapoton. "We knew [the Forest Service] couldn't protect us and said to ourselves all of a sudden, 'You've got to take care of yourself.' In Alaska, you've got to have a certain amount of self-reliance. You're on the road in the winter and you get stuck—you've got to get yourself out or you'll die. So you build up your self-confidence, and you feel good about what you do. You can take care of yourself. What Sarah stands for is less government and more self-reliance, more personal responsibility. If the government intervenes, it should be more helpful, and there should be less red tape. That's what I learned." ♦

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The McCain and Palin families meeting in Minneapolis on September 3, 2008.

GETTY IMAGES

Class Will Tell

Why the commentariat honors Bill Ayers as a respectable member of the upper middle class and finds Sarah Palin contemptible

By Sam Schulman

Pour yourself a Johnnie Walker Black and remember. The presidential campaign was going to be about sex—the sex of the inevitable winning candidate. Then it was going to be about race. We dreamed we would atone for slavery and the Berlin Airlift, impress Europe and charm the Arab world. But the undecided voters who will determine the winner are no longer interested in race or sex. They are looking at social class. Which ticket best expresses the values and tastes of the upper-middle-class—and captivates the rest of us who follow the lead of the upper-middles?

The class argument is why the Bill Ayers strategy won't do. In the sex and race eras, it would have worked nicely. Obama's longtime working collaboration with the radical educational theorist and retired terrorist would dramatize his carefully but hastily discarded political radicalism. But no longer. The anti-Ayers publicists are quite right about Ayers's malignity and Obama's connivance. But when they try to explain what Ayers has done in the past and still wants to do—turn schools into nurseries of revolution, make leftist views a condition for becoming a teacher, promote dictatorship, and glorify violence—they injure not help their cause. Class will always trump politics. Being the first in one's family to adopt liberal political sentiments or move to New York City means a step into the middle class, for most Americans, and an increase in social status. More extreme political radicalism lifts one a step or two higher.

Bill Ayers and Bernardine Dohrn became Sixties royalty not because of the status of the Ayers family in Chicago, but because of their relish for violence. They attempted to kill, and celebrated the killings of others (like Charles Manson's victims and the murder of any number of cops), to set an example for the less privileged. "We've known that our job is to lead white kids to armed revolution. . . . Tens of thousands have learned that protest and marches

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don't do it. Revolutionary violence is the only way," said the future Mrs. Ayers in 1970. On the other hand, there were the masses of students who merely marched and flashed the peace sign. Socially, they were nowhere. That was the shock of the Kent State massacre—the veteran martyrs of Harvard's University Hall and Columbia's Low Library wondered that such a terrible and authentic event could have taken place at a far-away state school to people of whom we knew nothing.

Now mainstream Chicago regards Ayers as rehabilitated—but why? He hasn't, like Chuck Colson, repented, or paid his debt to society by serving a prison term. He doesn't even enjoy the prestige of a Clinton presidential pardon. Susan Rosenberg, a fellow Weatherman for whom Mrs. Ayers did go to jail rather than implicate in the execution murders of several cops, enjoys that distinction. What makes the Ayerses respectable is purely a matter of upper-middle-class solidarity. You can see the ranks close around them in the texture of Richard Stern's elegant prose. Stern, a novelist and a long-serving University of Chicago English professor, reassures us:

> I've been to three or four small dinner parties with Ayers and his wife, Bernardine Dohrn, once hailed as the Weathermen's Dolores Ibárruri ("La Pasionaria"), a fiery, beautiful muse. . . . Dohrn is still attractive, while Ayers maintains an adolescent fizzle in his sexagenarian bones.

Carefully, Stern engages with the glamorous couple on equal terms, before judging them:

> At dinner, thirty-eight years later, Ayers and Dohrn did not seem to hold [my criticism of the 1970 University of Chicago student uprising] against me, and I didn't hold their fiery and criminally violent behavior against them. As in Chekhov's wonderful story "Old Age," time had planed down the sharp edges and brought one-time antagonists into each others' arms.

As the Ayerses' social equal, Stern can estimate them fairly.

> As far as I know, Ayers and Dohrn are loyal to the selves which led both of them to jail (though not for long), but they were busy doing other things, useful things, Ayers as educator, Dohrn as a legal counselor. They'd raised the child of a Weatherman who'd been jailed, they were taking care of Bernardine's ill mother, they were doing many things educated community activists were doing.

What the Ayerses now teach, think, and do hardly matters as long as they observe good form, the form of "educated community activists." Stern wants us to hear a mellow Chekhovian tone in their lives (and his prose). Perhaps, but in his moral reasoning I hear Oscar Wilde's Cecily Cardew, in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, observing that the Ayerses "have been eating muffins. That looks like repentance."

This is the first election since 1996 and only the second since 1984 that has not offered the voters at least one specimen, and sometimes a *dégustation* of several, upper-class Americans. The Bushes, Kerry, and Gore were all true American aristocrats, with a long lineage, distinguished ancestors, prep-school educations and tastes. Richard Stern couldn't muster an intimacy with their unattainable world—Skull & Bones, the Elizabeth Islands, wind-surfing, ancestral summer compounds. Mere achievement gets us nowhere. But this year, what makes class so important is how very close so many of us are to the upper-middle-class characters on offer on the Democrat ticket. Biden's background is comfy: high school quarterback not racing skipper, summers on Rehoboth Beach not Gibson Island. And even behind Obama's fiery mentors, there is an upper-middle-class background, attainable, imitable, and soothing. If one were to pick out one real achievement in Senator Obama's life, it is to show us that attaining his status has been pretty easy for him. And it can thus be pretty easy for us, if we just pull the right lever.

On the other hand, what can McCain and Palin offer except their two personal histories of struggle? John McCain speaks about service and sacrifice, and how he wore our nation's uniform, as if we want to hear about such things. But in my demographic slice of country, we are a little conflicted about such things as struggle, service, uniforms, and sacrifice. America's "officer class" does not generally include career military officers. In his book *Class*, Paul Fussell hypothesized that upper-middle-class men prefer natural-shoulder jackets because men's shoulders are a secondary sexual characteristic. "Epaulets emphasize the shoulders. They are thus associated with the lower classes, whose shoulders are required for physical work. The military makes much of epaulets, betraying instantly its prole associations."

The influential section of our upper-middle class, which lives in media centers, does, of course, have an understanding of the ethic of service, and a special familiarity with men in uniforms decorated with epaulets. Paula Throckmorton-Zakaria finds the spirit of service right at home in Manhattan:

> We may not have a "servant" class in the strict Victorian sense, but a "service" class we have indeed, and it is serving us. How do we square our egalitarian self-conceit with a liveried doorman? Not easily. For non-New Yorkers, doormen are the guys who carry the bags, organize the packages and tell you who stopped by to see your 15-year-old while you were out. They also open the door.

Receiving all those services in exchange for a partially deductible maintenance fee and a Christmas tip, we don't much miss the small matter of McCain's authentic service to his country. I, my children, and perhaps the Sulzberger and Couric children spent years passing through doors

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The Morley family butler, Clancy (Charles Bickford), watches over Katie (Loretta Young) bringing breakfast to the would-be senator Glenn Morley (Joseph Cotten) in The Farmer's Daughter *(1947).*

COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION

opened by uniformed, epauletted men on the way to private schools that were proud to teach an ethic of service. The experience didn't equip us to recognize the real thing.

And what about Sarah Palin? Here, the upper-middle-class deficit gets worse. Throckmorton-Zakaria's husband, Fareed Zakaria, uses a rare one-word sentence to make his entire argument against her: "Palin Is Ready? Please." She notoriously strikes the wrong class note on a thousand media keyboards with what Andrew Sullivan calls gallantly "Sarah Palin's cocktail waitress act." But the problem is not that the governor can't conform to upper-middle-class norms. It's that she won't.

If only Palin were really as trashy as Sullivan thinks she is. Sadly she is quite the opposite—one of nature's noblewomen. She rose by refusing to accept the limitations of her proper station in life; she is despised for continuing to do so. If Palin wants to pal around with the Throckmorton-Zakarias, she is wasting her time memorizing classic 19th-century Supreme Court decisions (Katie Couric isn't going to give her a mulligan). Instead, she should learn from watching herself as she ought to be.

Some will remember Loretta Young's Oscar-winning portrayal of Katie, *The Farmer's Daughter*, in the tearjerker of 1947. Katie is a respectable girl with a grating accent who serves in the household of a great Minnesota political dynasty, headed by matriarch Ethel Barrymore. The son and heir, Joseph Cotten, is about to step into his father's Senate seat in an uncontested election, until Katie speaks up at a public meeting. She causes a sensation. The desperate opposition party runs Katie against Cotten, an act of lèse-majesté which enrages Miss Barrymore—then wins her respect. So far the story traces Palin's trajectory. Palin emerged from the tutelage of local figures and rose to be their equal—but then went on to defeat her GOP antagonists at the polls, save her party in Alaska, and become a competent governor.

Katie, though, realizes that her place is not in the Senate, but as the bride of the new senator, guiding him from behind the scenes. Katie knew when to resume her proper place—but Sarah refuses to do so. No wonder Paula Throckmorton-Zakaria's husband is sore at her: "Is it too much to ask that she come to realize that she wants, in that wonderful phrase in American politics, 'to spend more time with her family?'"

Even better, Governor Palin, think of yourself as the *Admirable Crichton*. In J.M. Barrie's hit play of 1902, an aristocratic household—master, butler, tweenie, and all—is shipwrecked on a desert island. In the state of nature, all discover that the butler, Crichton, is the true leader. Just as

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the counterjumping Mrs. Palin had to take charge when the country club Republicans running Alaska became corrupt and lazy, Crichton accepts his new role calmly and saves the family. His reward is the promise of Lady Mary's love.

In the play, but not in Alaska, there is a neatly ironic conclusion. The little group is rescued. Back in London, nature's aristocrat yields silently to social order. The former lovers, back to buttling and being bride of the year, confront one another in a little scene that for generations induced tears in its audiences:

> LADY MARY: Do you despise me, Crichton? *(The man who could never tell a lie makes no answer.)* You are the best man among us.
> CRICHTON: On an island, my lady, perhaps; but in England, no.
> LADY MARY: Then there's something wrong with England.
> CRICHTON: My lady, not even from you can I listen to a word against England.

Palin, to our cost, refuses to play Crichton this way. She wants to be the best man, not just in Alaska, but even in America itself. This makes her audience not tearful, but profoundly uncomfortable from social anxiety. Noam Scheiber has a particularly grave case.

Scheiber's attempt to understand Sarah Palin, detailed in the *New Republic*, took him all the way to Wasilla, as strange to him as Ethiopia to Evelyn Waugh. Scheiber spoke to various people from Palin's past, all of whom have two things in common: Every one of them is smarter than Palin and none of them has been heard of since their encounter with her. Scheiber's pet specimen among what he calls "the more urbane members of the community" is a Dartmouth graduate who reads Civil War histories, self-published a book, and not only does but "savors" the *New York Times* crossword puzzle. This sort of résumé wouldn't get your niece an unpaid internship on L Street—but for a Rhodes Scholar lost in Alaska, the Dartmouth degree, the Civil War buffery, the *Times* crossword puzzle all take on huge significance. Unable to comprehend how Palin could have outpaced the Wasilla gentry, poor Scheiber clings for dear life to these sad fragments of class dignity.

Henry Irving as the Admirable Crichton and Irene Vanburgh as Lady Mary in J.M. Barrie's hit play of 1902.

While Palin threatens class solidarity, Obama is emollient. The more urbane members of the Hyde Park community are cleverer than their Wasilla counterparts and believe that they have captured Obama for their class—just as Richard Stern persuades himself that the still-radical couple he dines with are merely Unitarians in a hurry. But the man who may be president is cleverer still.

Obama and his surprising choice for vice president have spent most of their career working on their own images, smoothing out the rough edges, trying out devices, rhetorical and cosmetic, to make the nicer sort of people feel comfortable with them. Obama wrote his own life, and then wrote it again; Biden practiced for years in front of a mirror to overcome his childhood stutter. Carefully composed, Obama holds the upper-middle class in his steady hands, and has no need of Stern's help to assure our anxious electorate that he will not shock their class sensibilities.

The Republicans, alas, are stuck with this election's true and unrepentant revolutionaries. McCain and Palin have each refused, by sheer cussedness, to fulfill the social expectations of others. This may make them poison to undecideds who suffer, more than most, from class anxiety. But do not despise the undecideds. Even conservatives can contract Scheiber Syndrome. Think of David Brooks, Christopher Buckley, David Frum, Peggy Noonan, and George Will. The symptoms? Curiously amplified, obsessively repeated, sometimes elaborately stage-whispered doubts about the Republican ticket.

There is no cure, but there is an etiology. All share a dreadful secret—their writing is driven by an anxiety to be tastemakers to the gentry, not merely thinkers and entertainers. There is nothing more anxious-making than striving to create taste for the classes, not masses, or even to keep up with it. (The struggle to do so is etched in the lines of Tina Brown's face.) But what the classes think is a matter to which the GOP standard-bearers are sadly but nobly indifferent. ♦

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Katherine Anne Porter, 1950

BETTMANN / CORBIS

Pale Horse, Pale Writer

Is the author of 'Noon Wine' a classic? BY BROOKE ALLEN

Having by now published the best work of all the major writers in United States history, the Library of America has moved on to the B-list, with authors like Philip K. Dick, A.J. Liebling, and Katherine Anne Porter—all significant artists, but not on the level of Mark Twain or Nathaniel Hawthorne—represented in its Fall 2008 catalogue.

Since inclusion in the Library of America effectively imparts classic status, it is fascinating to see which authors the series' editors have decided to anoint. Take Porter, for instance: Do her works deserve to be called "classics"? Which are the best of them? The editors have omitted *Ship of Fools*, her only novel; was this decision justified? Was Porter overrated during her lifetime? Is she underrated now? Finally, will inclusion in the Library of America bring renewed attention and popularity to her short stories, which were once so highly thought of but have now fallen rather out of fashion?

Katherine Anne Porter
Collected Stories and Other Writings
Library of America, 1,100 pp., $40

Porter's short fiction originally appeared in three collections: *Flowering Judas and Other Stories* (1930), *Pale Horse, Pale Rider: Three Short Novels* (1939), and *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* (1944), and were brought together in Harcourt's 1965 *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter*; here, in the Library of America edition, they appear in their entirety. To read them all together is to be forcibly impressed with the author's imaginative power and descriptive gifts. She was a consummate short story writer, and the strengths she brought to this craft—the ability to convey instant visual and sensual impressions, the verbal adroitness that allowed her to sketch the essence of a character with precision—proved something of a liability when she turned to the

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novel form. In a novel, characters need to develop; in a short story, they have only to *be*. Bestseller though it was, *Ship of Fools* (1962) showed that Porter found it hard to make her characters change organically, and from the moment of its publication, her reputation began to decline. Eventually her stories, once widely anthologized and held up as models of the genre by countless critics and educators, were almost forgotten. This is too bad, for she was one of the most original artists of her epoch, and one of the most surprising, too.

Nearly all fiction contains autobiographical elements, but such factors played an even greater role in Porter's work than is usually the case. Her fiction tended to be drawn directly from her own experiences ("Pale Horse, Pale Rider," for example, is a quite faithful account of the author's near death during the influenza epidemic of 1918), but some of these experiences were imaginary rather than literal; she reinvented herself and her past as she went along, having, as one of her biographers said, an absolute "inability to accept the disunion between what life is and what it should be." Refusing to accept the demeaning reality of her impoverished childhood in rural Texas, she concocted a romantic background of faded southern aristocracy. What's more, she got away with it, for she wrote about the false background as exquisitely and with as deeply felt conviction (in "Old Mortality" and "The Old Order," for instance) as she recreated her actual milieu ("Noon Wine," "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," "He").

Commenting on her methods, Porter said, "my fiction is reportage, only I do something to it. I arrange it and it is fiction but it happened."

Porter laid claim to being the first artist of international stature to emerge from Texas, and she always kept up with her local connections although she left the state in 1914, at the age of 23, and returned there only a few times during the remaining 60-odd years of her life. My own mother originated not far from Porter's birthplace of Indian Creek, and during my childhood in the 1960s and '70s the author was still widely remembered in Brown County, not so much for her world-class fiction as for her world-class genius for self-invention and pretense; she was "a piece of work," everyone affirmed. Married five times, she usually acknowledged only three husbands ("I have no *hidden* marriages," she once said, "they just sort of slip my mind"). Porter's transformation from plucky provincial career girl to literary *grande dame* was observed with amusement by those who knew her over the long haul.

"In the days of her fame," wrote one former lover, writer Matthew Josephson, ". . . I found she had changed and was playing a role suited to what she conceived to be her public image." He recalled her various acolytes, mostly homosexual men, "sitting at her feet as if she were a bronze monument, deferent, reverent, genuflective."

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Childhood has a privileged place in Porter's short fiction. "I have not much interest in anyone's personal history after the tenth year, not even my own," she wrote. "Whatever one was going to be was all prepared for before that, the rest is merely confirmation, extension, development. Childhood is the fiery furnace in which we are melted down to essentials and that essential shaped for good."

Her alter ego in this fiction is Miranda Gay, second daughter of a Texas family which, in many aspects, reflects the actual Porter family and in others draws from her more genteel fantasy-family. Like the author, Miranda is an observer ("Miranda" means "looking," after all), sometimes a ruthless one, and her reflections can be dark. As Porter wrote, "I do not believe that childhood is a happy time, it is a time of desperate cureless bitter griefs and pains, of shattering disillusionments, when everything good and evil alike is happening for the first time, and there is no answer to any question."

Porter's own childhood was marked by poverty, dislocation, and trauma: She lost her mother when she was not yet two years old, and her grandmother, the formidable matriarch she described and elaborated upon so brilliantly in "The Old Order," died nine years later. Her father was feckless and unreliable. Her maternal grandmother was institutionalized and Porter never lost her fear of succumbing to the "melancholia" that plagued the family. Yet nothing she wrote is more beautiful, or more passionate, than the sensual, rapt, retrospective descriptions of the Texas she then inhabited—heartbreaking passages when one considers the malls and car dealerships that now blanket that fruitful land.

> the sound of mourning doves in the live oaks, the childish voices of parrots chattering on every back porch in the little towns, the hoverings of buzzards in the high blue air—all the life of that soft blackland farming country, full of fruits and flowers and birds. . . .The colors and tastes all had their smells, as the sounds now have their echoes: the bitter whiff of air over a sprawl of animal skeleton after the buzzards were gone; the smells and flavors of roses and melons, and peach bloom and ripe peaches, of cape jessamine in hedges blooming like popcorn, and the sickly sweetness of chinaberry florets; of honeysuckle in great swags on a trellised gallery; heavy tomatoes dead ripe and warm with the midday sun, eaten there, at the vine; the delicious milky green

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> corn, savory hot corn bread eaten with still-warm milk; and the clinging brackish smell of the muddy little ponds.

Porter's greatest achievements are the stories that most faithfully reflect the childhood world that she hated and loved, that she left so early and never forgot; and of these stories the best is "Noon Wine." In 1956, two decades after she completed the piece, she wrote an essay called "'Noon Wine': The Sources" for the *Yale Review*. The essay became famous and was much anthologized, especially in writing textbooks. But even though she had made the decision to explore this subject, Porter still was unable to approach the truth head-on, making, instead, a series of feints in a futile attempt to catch hold of some inner truth that would ground the story in a way she found acceptable. She claimed never to have known Mr. and Mrs. Thompson, the fictional poor Texas farmers at the center of the tale, but in fact they were entirely based upon her cousins—she did not even change their name, or that of Mr. Helton, the Swedish hired man. Their farm, to which she was sent on visits during her adolescence, seems to have been exactly as she describes it in the story.

As Porter's biographer Joan Givner has written:

> That Porter wrote the story at all reflects her desire to recreate her familial background, and that she chose from all her stories to probe the sources of this one shows her need to understand her relationship to her early environment. The fact that she came so close and yet could still not acknowledge her relationship to her own place and her own people suggests her fatal ambivalence on the subject.

After her departure from Texas, Porter led a peripatetic, cosmopolitan life, and her fiction reflects her travels. Her years as a young reporter in Denver are quite faithfully recreated in "Pale Horse, Pale Rider." She lived in Mexico in the early 1920s and the country became a beloved second homeland; she worked her experiences there into a number of her fictional pieces, including "Flowering Judas," "That Tree," "Hacienda" (which was based on her observations of Sergei Eisenstein and his crew filming *¡Que Viva Mexico!*), parts of *Ship of Fools*, and *María Concepcíon*, her first published story—or at any rate, the first she cared to acknowledge. She moved to Greenwich Village a bit later, living there during the glory years of the '20s and befriending fellow writers such as Hart Crane, Ford Madox Ford, Malcolm Cowley, and

EUDORA WELTY / CORBIS

Allen Tate. This neighborhood did not work its way into much of her fiction, but she set one of her most brilliant and blackest tales, "A Day's Work," in a nearby Irish neighborhood.

A journey to Germany in 1931 inspired the long story "The Leaning Tower." (The tale is dated "1931" in this edition but was actually written a decade later, with Hitler's war providing all-too-ironic hindsight.) Characteristically, Porter laid claim to having sent letters to American newspapers back in 1931, warning them of the danger of the nascent Nazi party, but this appears to have been an exaggeration at best. She *was* squired around town by Hermann Göring, which she seems to have enjoyed, and took in the sights and sounds of bitter, poverty-stricken interwar Berlin.

Katherine Anne Porter: Collected Stories and Other Writings has been edited by Darlene Harbour Unrue, a scholar who has built her career on Porter's work, with several books on the subject, including a 2005 biography that has more or less supplanted Givner's 1982 one. Only about half of her Library of America 1,100-page collection is taken up with Porter's fiction; the rest is given over to essays, which are fascinating, and reviews, which are only intermittently so. A virulent attack on Gertrude Stein ("The Wooden Umbrella," 1947) is hilarious and still well worth reading; a sympathetic essay on Willa Cather is a model of critical empathy. Predictably (for Porter is the most subjective and personal of fiction writers), it is the authors with whom she personally identifies—Cather, Katherine Mansfield, Colette, Eudora Welty—who inspire the most deeply felt criticism; a long essay on Henry James is dutifully reverent but lifeless.

One of the two biographies, either Unrue's or Givner's (they are both good), will make an invaluable supplement to this Library of America volume, for the life and work of this strange, gifted woman are connected in unusually complicated and contradictory ways. She herself was aware of the contradictions, and attempted to explain herself—never very successfully.

"I believe we exist on half a dozen planes in at least six dimensions," she commented, "and inhabit all periods of time at once, by way of memory, racial experience, dreams that are another channel of memory, fantasy that is also reality, and I believe that a first rate work of art somehow succeeds in pulling all these things together and reconciling them. When we deliberately ignore too much we make a fatal mistake."

The imaginary life, then, is as true as the actual one, and vice versa. Few authors' works have illustrated this fact more dramatically than Porter's. ♦

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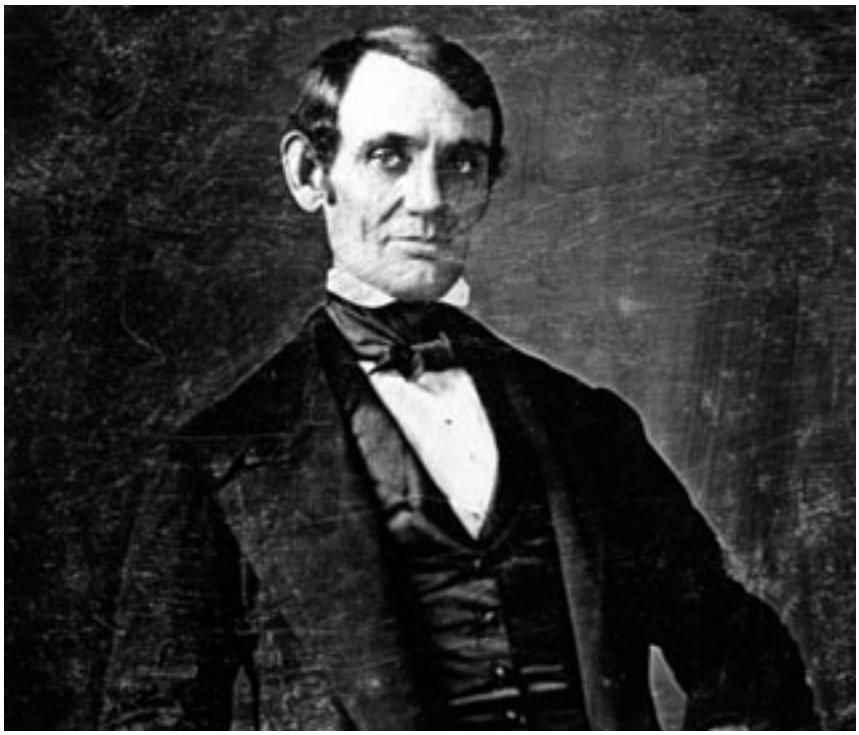
Transitional Lincoln

The speech that put a frontier lawyer-politician on the road to the White House. **BY YUVAL LEVIN**



Abraham Lincoln, ca. 1847

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Our world has many problems, but a shortage of books about Abraham Lincoln is not generally thought to be one of them. Lincoln is easily the most chronicled and examined figure in American history, and these days, academic historians often struggle to squeeze into any possible remaining gap in his story, or grasp for clever or controversial theories that might get their work noticed amidst the swarm of Lincoln scholarship. It takes a very special book to offer fresh wisdom on our 16th president and stand out from the pack without distorting its subject. Lewis Lehrman has written such a book.

Lincoln at Peoria
The Turning Point
by Lewis E. Lehrman
Stackpole, 350 pp., $29.95

As a philanthropist and patron of historical scholarship, Lehrman has long been associated with the study of Lincoln, although this is his first book on the subject. It is, as he tells us, a labor of love, several decades in the making. And *Lincoln at Peoria* does suffer from some of the failings of such labors of love: It is, in places, overargued and overwritten, cramming in every possible quotation and citation, every imaginable scholarly reference to support even the smallest points, yielding needless repetition. But more often it benefits from the devoted attention it has clearly received from its author, and from Lehrman's command of the immense range of scholarship on Lincoln.

He begins from the mystery of Lincoln's political reemergence in 1854. In his early political exertions, culminating in his single term in the House of Representatives (1847-49), Lincoln was a fairly run-of-the-mill northern Whig. His top priorities were economic development and improvements to what we now call infrastructure, and he was known for his folksy sense of humor and talent for telling entertaining stories on the stump.

With his reelection prospects grim, Lincoln declined to run for a second term and returned to his legal practice, and while he was still tangentially involved in Illinois Whig machinations, he was, by the mid-1850s, a successful, comfortable, and on the whole, unremarkable Springfield attorney. He had made a few statements and speeches in opposition to slavery, Lehrman notes, but no more than would be expected of any Illinois Whig, and the subject never seemed to preoccupy him.

All of that changed with the emergence of what must stand as the single most disastrous piece of legislation in American history: the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. The act, championed by Illinois senator Stephen Douglas, overturned the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which had sought to avert sectional conflict by dividing the territories of the Louisiana Purchase into slave and free states and so preserving an uneasy balance on the slavery question in Congress.

Together with the Compromise of 1850, which did the same for territory gained in the Mexican War, the arrangement had largely kept the peace between north and south. Douglas's bill sought, instead, to allow each state to determine the status of slavery in its territory by popular vote, thus making slavery again a live political issue.

The prospect of overturning the Missouri Compromise shocked Abraham Lincoln into action. Lehrman argues persuasively that this awakening offers

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an example of Lincoln's essentially conservative political temperament. He quotes Lincoln's fellow Illinois lawyer Samuel C. Parks, noting that Lincoln was disturbed not only by the direction but by the sharpness and abruptness of Douglas's effort: "The occasion of his becoming a great anti-slavery leader was the agitation of the repeal of the Missouri Compromise," Parks wrote.

Lincoln's opening moves in this new chapter of his political life aimed to defend the complex and layered arrangement of slavery compromises reached in the previous half century, particularly the Missouri Compromise and the aim of the gradual elimination of slavery Lincoln believed was implicit in its logic.

Douglas's ill-considered bill, as Lehrman demonstrates, linked Lincoln's type of essentially conservative anti-slavery feeling with both more radical abolitionism and more conservative unionism in the north, while support for it became a litmus test for southern politicians of all parties. It therefore elevated sectional divisions above partisan ones, and exposed the American political system to powerful stresses long kept in check.

Yet the new northern coalition had a less powerful regional identity than its southern counterpart, and needed a theory—a case for itself—before it could rise to the challenge of the moment. Just then, Lincoln emerged, offering this nascent coalition a vocabulary of idealism mixed with moderation, and Americanism joined to universal values.

"In the turmoil occasioned by the repeal of the Missouri Compromise," Lehrman writes, "Lincoln's historical and moral imagination fastened upon the principles of the Declaration of Independence, the policies of the American founding, and the history of slavery" to offer a profound yet practical case for opposition to Douglas's gambit.

Lincoln had come to his arguments through laborious historical research, a keen judgment of the moment, and a deep moral sense of the injustice of slavery. He championed a radical truth in a conservative way, and this made him a force to reckon with, and quickly catapulted him to the leadership of the burgeoning Republican coalition, and from the Illinois legal circuit to the White House.

Lincoln's first and, perhaps, most profound explication of his new case was a speech offered in response to remarks by Senator Douglas in Peoria on October 16, 1854. That speech, Lehrman writes, formed "the foundations of [Lincoln's] politics and principles" from then until his assassination 11 years later. In it we find a new Lincoln, more serious and sober, no longer the folksy storyteller, now a man of vision, patience, determination, and purpose.

Lincoln at Peoria, therefore, treats the speech as the crucial episode in Lincoln's story, "the turning point," as the subtitle puts it. The speech exemplifies Lincoln's new purpose and method, and it introduces all the key ideas that would define the man we meet in the history books.

And yet, by grounding the book insistently in the Peoria speech, Lehrman unduly limits himself and undersells his insights and accomplishments. The focus on Peoria, for instance, causes him to lay out the political history of the period out of order, first bringing us through the 1854 speech and only then describing the context of the Missouri Compromise and the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Lehrman's discussion of the rearrangement of American party loyalties, and the chaotic reshuffling of national politics in the wake of Douglas's bill, is among the book's strongest points, and must be among the most clear and accessible histories of the period yet written, but it is undermined by being cast as mere background for the Peoria speech.

The momentous events that came after the speech—the Lincoln-Douglas Senate race, the *Dred Scott* decision, and Lincoln's entire presidency—are presented with uncommon insight and care, but these, too, are forced into the box of the Peoria speech to suit the larger conceit of the book. (Lehrman entitles his chapter on Lincoln's White House years "Peoria Characterizes the Lincoln Presidency.")

In fact, this exceptional book is about much more than Lincoln at Peoria. It stands out for the way it combines the study of Lincoln's arguments with the study of Lincoln's character, and so not only avoids the cynicism of historians who seek to ignore the substance of Lincoln's profound and powerful rhetoric but also offers a compelling corrective to the opposite inclination (all too common among some conservative fans of Lincoln) to note *only* his arguments, and not his subtle, prudent politics.

Lehrman offers by way of example a strong remedy to what might be called the great transitive error of the Lincoln mythology: the implicit idea that because Lincoln made the best public arguments against slavery *and* ended slavery, his arguments ended slavery.

No one simply believes this, of course. We all know there was a war in which 700,000 Americans died, and that slavery was ended by force. But too often in looking to Lincoln for a model of statesmanship we look to the public arguments he made more than to the leadership he offered when those arguments failed.

Lincoln had sought mightily to avoid the war, and he recognized that its coming was, in key respects, a failure of statesmanship, including his own prewar statesmanship. But having come to that point, Lincoln also understood better than most the absolute need for determined leadership in wartime, and for victory. And he understood how the case he had made to the American people before the war could now help him to strengthen and lead them in the darkest hours of the struggle. The greatest mark of Lincoln's statesmanship is that he grasped this and acted on it.

We do not find the case for that kind of statesmanship in Lincoln's Peoria speech, but we do find the character and the capacity for it in the Abraham Lincoln that Lewis Lehrman describes in this fine book. That is why, as Lehrman understands, a study of Lincoln's character is as important as a study of his arguments, and why this book, which offers an exceptional example of both and which explains the connection between them, deserves to be noticed amidst the throng of Lincoln books. ♦

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Boyz n the Book

Johnny can read, but won't, and who can blame him?

BY MARY GRABAR

A Rip Van Winkle waking up from a 30-year nap on a college campus today would notice a strange change in the student body. Most of the students walking past him would be women.

A generation ago, women made up less than half the student body. But in 2005 they made up 57 percent of total fall enrollments, and the Department of Education estimates the gender discrepancies will increase every year in the foreseeable future. Also, once they are in college, women are more likely to finish. In 2005-06, graduation rates favored women by 26 percent in terms of earning bachelor's degrees, and 33 percent in master's degrees. Even among doctorates, where men still hold a slight advantage, women are projected to eclipse them in 2014.

Advanced Placement high school classes provide a good barometer for determining who will go on to college, and here, too, women surpass men. Females make up 64 percent in English literature and 63 percent in English language and composition. They outdo males significantly in history (United States, European, and world), art history, and the romance languages. Only in certain classes, mainly in mathematics and advanced sciences, do boys exceed girls: They hold a clear lead in computer science (83 percent), physics (65 percent to 78 percent in higher levels), advanced calculus (59 percent), and economics, although females equal them in Calculus A/B and beat them in biology, environmental science, and psychology.

Also, at the high school level, we see the same outcomes for boys and girls. For instance, the gender gap in reading scores widened between 1992 and 2005: According to the Department of Education, it grew from 10 points among 12th graders (297 for girls vs. 287 for boys) to 16 points (295 vs. 279). Writing skills seem to follow reading levels, according to a 2005 DOE study that showed that high school seniors who read for fun "almost every day" scored an average of 165 on writing assessments while those who "never or hardly ever" read for fun scores of only 136. While the gap in recent years has closed, this month's National Assessment of Educational Progress report showed a yawning 18-point gap between girls and boys.

Further data suggest that college women perform so much better not because of intelligence but because of study habits. College women are 35 percent more likely to study daily and 23 percent more likely to read their textbooks thoroughly, according to a report by the Association of American Publishers. They also do more voluntary reading, as the 2007 National Endowment for the Arts survey on reading showed. They also read much more nonliterary material than boys do. While from 1992 to 2002 levels of voluntary literary reading—one novel, short story, play, or poem in the past year—fell off among all age groups, the largest drop came among young adults 18 to 24. But the drop among young males was *three* times as large as for young women, with declines from 55 percent to 43 percent, compared with 63 percent to 59 percent among women.

No doubt, many factors play in girls' superior performance in grades and graduation, and the reading that accompanies them. Many basic behaviors of boys work against them in academic environments. They have more discipline problems than girls, they play more sports, and they spend more hours working and being outdoors.

The University of North Carolina suggests one answer on its website, where it acknowledges the problems boys are having with reading. The website connects these problems to a lack of male influence: "Socially," it explains, "boys have few male reading role models at home or school. Most librarians and teachers are women; mothers read to children more frequently than fathers." The authors acknowledge, too, the lack of "masculine" books that would appeal to boys on such topics as sports, war, and competition.

Those interests explain why boys like video games. They present a "quest in which an imperiled hero tries to find clues or treasure and earn advantages so he can go to the next level," according to Tom Newkirk, director of the New Hampshire Literacy Institutes. It's the action, danger, and purpose in a competitive arena that interests boys. Boys like conflict, tests of strength, and strategy in their play. Girls prefer games and books that tend toward the virtues of cooperation and sensitivity.

But when we turn to those responsible for promoting reading we find that they promote those virtues that appeal to girls. Literacy Matters, whose purpose, according to its web page, is "to improve middle literacy development," tells teachers that adolescents like books about "finding one's self, the search for direction in their life, and becoming independent" and "resolving conflict, either within the self or with another person," as well as "learning about different places, cultures, times, and ethnicities" and "addressing problems in the social order."

Boys prefer a definitely un-sensitive Conan the Barbarian, or G.I. Joe, or Huckleberry Finn, and without regard to his Indo-European heritage, to a heroine whose life story involves being a "survivor" after

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bearing her father's baby at age 12, and then becoming pregnant by him again at age 16. This is the story of Precious Jones in *Push*, a book recommended on the American Library Association's website for young adult readers as one of the 25 "Outstanding Books for the College Bound." It involves a "dedicated teacher, and classmates who understand" at an alternative school. Another book, *My Heartbeat*, has this enticing blurb: "Can Ellen get the boy who loves her brother?"

Out of the 25 books on this list, 18 are novels or memoirs. The protagonists in 14 of these are female and, overwhelmingly, the accompanying blurbs describe such plots involving conflicts of a personal nature, with emotional resolutions. One of the few books that feature male protagonists, *Forgotten Fire*, is described as a "touching and heart-wrenching portrait of pain and triumph" during the Armenian Genocide while *Postcards from No Man's Land* is about 17-year-old Jacob's "self-discovery."

No books on this list offer soldiers, male athletes, or adventurers.

Syllabi of classes in library science, linked on the ALA's web page, reveal what future librarians study. At the University of Iowa, one class, "Trends and Issues in Literature for Young Adults," includes such required reading for librarians-in-training as: *Born Confused*; *Rainbow Boys*; *how i live now*; *Stoner & Spaz*; *Vegan, Virgin, Valentine*. And while the course description acknowledges a focus on the challenges of contemporary culture, some of these kinds of books—like the explicitly homoerotic play *Angels in America*, assigned to students at a high school in Illinois, and *Prep*, a coming-of-age novel assigned to 12-year-olds in California—have made headlines recently.

Sandra Stotsky, professor of education reform at the University of Arkansas, asserts, "The research on children's reading interest consistently shows that boys like to read nonfiction, especially historical nonfiction (biographies, books on important wars/battles), adventure stories, books on sports, books on facts, and science fiction." But when Forrest Hills, in my own DeKalb County, Georgia, recommends nonfiction books for students in grades seven through nine, the list skews heavily toward those about women: Rosie the Riveter, Roseanne Barr, Sandra Day O'Connor, Frida Kahlo, Marian Wright Edelman, Oprah Winfrey, and two each on Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Hillary Rodham Clinton, with series of books on women explorers and women inventors.

Likewise, the pedagogical method of treating these books reflects a feminine, not to say feminist, outlook. The popular Prentice-Hall high school English textbook emphasizes collaborative and associative learning with a series of questions garnering emotional responses at the end of each unit. For example, students are asked to "respond," "recall," "interpret," "infer," and "take a position" after each selection. These selections, however, are chosen for their messages and are surrounded by editorial material like this passage that appears after "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" in the 11th grade book: "The senseless violence, death, and destruction Ambrose Bierce witnessed during the American Civil War (1861-1865) convinced him that war was terrible and futile."

The following "Unit," on the period 1914-46, of the two world wars, is edited by the antiwar Vietnam-era writer Tim O'Brien and entitled "Disillusion, Defiance, and Discontent." Other school districts even prescribe collaboration and sensitivity in their policy statements. The DeKalb County school district mandates a "student-centered curriculum" that "uses collaborative rather than bureaucratic instructional modes" and "sensitizes people to racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity."

AP PHOTO / CHARLES KENNETH

Although alarming statistics indicate that methods and reading materials that emphasize cooperation and sensitivity do not seem to serve the needs of boys, education schools, such as the one at Chapel Hill, resist adapting to proven methods. They caution on their web page about "stereotypes and reinforcing behaviors or attitudes which may not benefit boys. Just as teachers should avoid 'feminizing' boys by discouraging masculine characteristics, so too should they resist 'choosing books that match stereotyped views of boys' interests and capacities that may perpetuate those stereotypes and deny alternative interests.'"

But what about when boys' interests follow those masculine stereotypes of tests of strength, intelligence, and bravery—as research indicates they do? Are boys' academic achievements sacrificed in the name of resisting "stereotypes"? A stroll down any college campus today suggests that, indeed, whatever effect new reading materials and curricula have, they are not luring boys to higher education. ♦

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Show Freaks

A murder mystery in the Theater of Marvels.

BY SHAWN MACOMBER

In "Wordplay," a Wes Craven-directed episode of the under-appreciated 1980s *Twilight Zone* revival, a middle-aged medical supply salesman notices an inexplicable shift in the everyday vocabulary of those around him as he struggles to pronounce (never mind actually *sell*!) new products. His wife begins to say "dinosaur" rather than "lunch." The "Fasten Seatbelt" light on his dashboard now reads "Fasten Stepdad." His boss begins calling him Tinge Thunder, not Bill Lowery.

The Somnambulist
by Jonathan Barnes
Morrow, 368 pp., $23.95

"We've got the one thing only time can give you," a fellow old workhorse insists when Lowery begins to fray, "Mayonnaise." Soon Lowery is left leafing through a toddler's wordbook trying to make sense of it all.

Edward Moon, the past-his-prime magician-*cum*-private eye mucking his way through a Victorian London on the edge of apocalypse in this farcical supernatural mystery by Jonathan Barnes, could likely relate to the *rapid-societal-change-can-induce-anxiety* subtext of Tinge Thunder's quandary.

Moon spends his evenings working the stage at his Theater of Marvels, summoning live Galapagos tortoises out of thin air, exercising his considerable powers of telepathy on audience members (revealing, for example, to one shocked woman that her husband has been, of late, "engaged in intimate relations with a scullery maid") and thrusting swords through his assistant, the Somnambulist, a strange, superhuman figure standing "as silent and impassive as an uprooted Easter Island statue" as he accepts the blades with yawns and the comportment of "a bored commuter waiting for a train."

Speaking of *ennui*, this routine, difficult as it may be for those of us with less exotic workplace duties to believe, is as soul-stifling for Moon as cold calls to sell a sphygmomanometer are for Tinge Thunder. Moon is at the top of his game, yet his audience is disappearing faster than a rabbit crammed in a trick stovepipe hat. What's worse, the magician can relate: Moon is "chronically, terminally, dangerously bored." Although, to be fair, his housekeeper also snipes, "You get bored the way other men get the clap"—which is a bit of nastiness he's presumably been able to avoid despite frequenting a circus-sideshow brothel where the madam says things like, "The seal girl will be free in an hour. The pinhead's ready now."

If losing oneself in the warm, fuzzy embrace of a bearded lady is a sign of a man seeking a second act in life, then Edward Moon certainly is and, predictably, Jonathan Barnes is willing to provide one in the form of a rich widow who hires him to solve the murder of her husband. Moon is, well, over the moon at the request ("it was only with an enormous effort of will that he was able to stifle a grin"), and we soon learn that the magician once had a thriving side career as a detective, bringing tough cases with tabloid nicknames such as "The Adventure of Smugglers' Bay" and "The Crookback Incursion of Eighty-Eight" to successful conclusion until a tragic bungled investigation ruined his reputation and landed his last, unexpectedly demented/murderous assistant in the pokey.

It isn't quite clear, exactly, why a man with a super-attuned, supernatural deductive sense would get such personal satisfaction out of solving crimes. But Moon obviously savors the thought of the potential good publicity (which, perhaps, makes this a more modern tale than its setting suggests) and a return to the enviable place in high society his former renown once warranted.

Alas, there is no easy celebrity to be earned in the complicated, otherworldly probe that follows. Instead, we have a killer-prostitute who transmogrifies into a client's mother working in tandem with a giant scaled creature, a time-traveling informant cryptically hinting at a very bad future, undercover government agents disguised as Chinese manservants, giant killer demons dressed as little British schoolboys, and a crazed, cult-like group called the Church of the Summer Kingdom, backed by the "massively wealthy" corporation Love, Love, Love, and Love, plotting the violent overthrow of the civilized order while simultaneously reanimating Samuel Taylor Coleridge—organs from William Wordsworth, toes from Charles Lamb, a hand from Robert Southey—to lead the utopian commune society the poet once advocated building on the banks of the Susquehanna River.

And those oddities are but the tip of the crazy, sprawling iceberg. *The Somnambulist* rarely flags, even if Barnes's giddy exuberance for piling one imaginatively bizarre scene atop another can occasionally serve as an enemy of cohesiveness. (After all, when nothing is what it seems, cutting virtually any narrative corner becomes permissible.) Still, the emotional heart of Moon's journey could not be any clearer. He may prance self-assuredly into this milieu, but he stumbles out, tail between his legs, like Tinge Thunder, learning the hard way that, often as not, our talents grow frail and expire well before our trust in them.

The magician's prescience falls to his desire to be relevant again, and this misplaced hope for a return to former glory, paradoxically, ruins any chance of achieving it again. The secret language of the world he could once so easily intuit from the minds of

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men—and occasionally put to humiliating use for the entertainment of others—has become as foreign to him as "Fasten Stepdad."

Ironically, for a novel so giddy in execution, *The Somnambulist* is chock full of such self-defeatist yearning, from poor Coleridge, who awakens from what was advertised as an eternal slumber to learn his beloved utopian scheme has become justification for bloodlust and genocide, to the time-traveling informant saddled with the knowledge that there is no real place for him or his compatriots in the future London they are collectively attempting to save.

Later, when the narrator writes of his last glimpse of Edward Moon, he describes the broken man as "a little older, perhaps, greyer, with some of the swagger gone out of him, and some of his vanity, his preening self-confidence, satisfyingly punctured"—adding, "All in all, I thought it an improvement." ♦

Kitsch in Cabinets

Behind every successful politician stands a collector.

BY ANDREW STUTTAFORD

An opportunity to listen to Robert Kennedy Jr. promoting his new book blaming Republicans for just about everything was not my notion of a fun time. But an old friend needed someone to accompany her to the event, which might, she said doubtfully, "do you some good." More realistically, she also threw in the enticements of free food, free drink, and an interesting crowd; besides, she added, "You'll get on well with our hosts, particularly Jordan. The two of you have a lot in common. A lot."

As usual, Mimi was mostly right. Nice food, pleasant people, plenty to drink. The younger RFK proved unsurprising in his opinions and astonishing in his resemblance to his father; but it was the other political figures present who transformed the evening into something close to magic.

Bobby senior was there, and to pick out just a few more, so were Jack, Lyndon, Barry, and Ron, along with various Roosevelts, Honest Abe, Tricky Dick, and the Georges, Bush, Bush, Washington, Wallace, and McGovern, in plastic, celluloid, paper, silk, tin, linen, pottery—you name it, all crowded into one New York City apartment, prize specimens drawn from what is, almost certainly, the most spectacular private collection of political (and, in particular, American electoral) ephemera ever assembled. A portion of it can now be seen at *Campaigning for President: New York and the American Election*, the hypnotic, dazzling, don't-miss exhibition of pointillist political history now showing at the Museum of the City of New York.

Campaigning for President
New York and the American Election
Museum of the City of New York

If you've ever been gripped by an unexpected desire to see a Grover Cleveland chamber pot (a little counter-intuitively, this was a thank-you gift to some of his more generous supporters), a Max Headroom-cool Barry Goldwater cardboard mask from the 1964 Republican convention, or a Ulysses S. Grant train set, this is the show for you. If you want an idea of the spectacle, the carnival and the exuberant, the unruly vigor of America's constantly evolving democracy, *Campaigning for President* is for you, too. And if you're the type of person who likes reading THE WEEKLY STANDARD, just go and see it without any further delay (although, like another spectacle I could mention, the exhibition actually runs until November).

A good number of the items on display are rough, tough—vicious, even—but taken as a whole, this is, you'll discover, what we-the-people means. These buttons, pamphlets, pins, ribbons, canes, hats, brooches, posters, badges, lanterns, combs ("comb Nixon out of your hair"), trinkets, doodads, and toys are the relics, sometimes almost the last relics, of past debates, crusades, contests, and parades, most forgotten, a few not, but all of them evocative evidence of a nation where more and more were pushing, shoving, and shouting to make themselves heard and, sometimes, succeeding.

But splendid though this selection is, it's only part of a hoard one-and-a-quarter million strong, a collection that is now bereft of the man who put it together. For just weeks before the show opened, Jordan M. Wright died suddenly, aged only 50. He leaves behind him a family, friends—and a presidential campaign that will now have to go uncurated.

The opening of this exhibition would have been a source of immense pride to him, but tragically transformed into a monument to one of America's great collectors, it falls somewhat short. What's missing is a clear picture of Jordan Wright himself. There's a hint contained within a quotation on a display that hangs near the entrance, explaining that "it all started with a button" from RFK's 1968 presidential campaign, but for more, you'll need to turn to *Campaigning for President: Memorabilia from the Nation's Finest Private Collection* (HarperCollins, 292 pp., $35).

It's there that a fuller picture begins to emerge:

> When I was ten . . . I would stop off at the Robert F. Kennedy for President headquarters. It was the first place I had ever visited where people were talking about the important issues of the day. . . . As an added bonus, every week there were new buttons that you could have for free. I never missed a week. … It did not take me long to figure out that if they were giving

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> away free buttons at the Kennedy headquarters, then they probably were at McCarthy's, Humphrey's and Nixon's . . . too. There were . . . also posters, bumper stickers, and campaign brochures. I collected everything I could get my hands on.

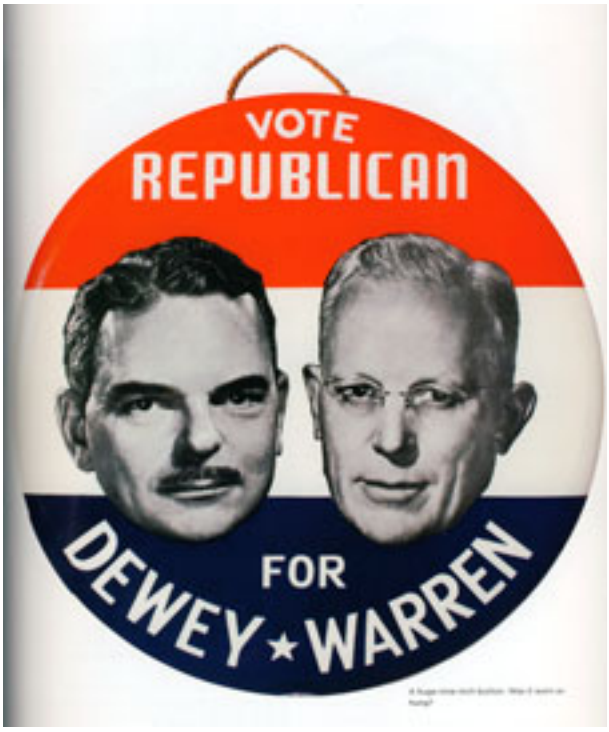
And that's enough to signal to other collectors that we (yes, I am also one of *those*: postage stamps, Baltic and British, artwork of the First World War, old travel books, and, me too, political ephemera) are in the presence of one of our own.

There's the early start; there's the intellectual interest, overwhelming and intoxicating, in the subject matter; and then there is the growing, thrilling compulsion located somewhere between addiction and more cheerfully defined pleasures, a magpie craving that needs to be fed but can never be satisfied: "I never missed a week . . . I collected everything I could get my hands on." Naturally.

The spoor of the true collector can be detected throughout Wright's lovely, lovingly compiled, and magnificently quirky book. There are the excitedly recounted treasure hunts ("Following the crowd, I stumbled into a firemen's memorabilia show and sale"), the amazing coups ("How I acquired a pro-Lewis Cass, anti-Zachary Taylor mechanical metamorphic card is truly lucky"), and an enjoyably tricky, gleefully finicky set of rules and regulations ("the congressional collection is weaker because I refuse to collect items from men who died before they could serve in Congress—even if their widows replaced them").

Then there is the photographic evidence of the collector's characteristic anxiety about unwrapping, of taking apart what should always be kept together. An old New Hampshire ballot box is shown still locked, its voting papers left uncounted and undisturbed. An iron-on McGovern patch ("I bought it at the McGovern Boutique") has, like my "Turkey Dinner" George W. Bush, never been removed from its packet.

Not long after arriving at Jordan's place that evening, I was introduced to him as a fellow collector, as an owner of a Mrs. Thatcher teapot, no less. His response was a keen question about Michael Howard memorabilia (so far as I was aware the Tory leader had generated few knick-knacks) followed by a quick, delighted, and delightful introductory tour of his collection. Within minutes I was surrounded by statesmen and charlatans, by victors and vanquished, by posters, by effigies, by that made precious by time.



The Republican national ticket, 1948

I had been shown an FDR *vice*-presidential button (from the 1920 campaign, as I'm sure you remember), Richard Nixon's monogrammed White House dressing gown, and an impressively tawdry souvenir of the Monica Lewinsky affair. I was, obviously, in the presence of a master.

There's a passage in Bruce Chatwin's *Utz*, the wittiest and most perceptive novel I have ever read about a collector, in which Chatwin's hero, the acquisitive, eponymous Utz, reveals what some collectors undoubtedly feel about museums:

> An object in a museum case . . . must suffer the de-natured existence of an animal in the zoo. In any museum the object dies—of suffocation and the public gaze—whereas private ownership confers on the owner the right and the need to touch. As a young child will reach out to handle the thing it names, so the passionate collector, his eye in harmony with his hand, restores to the object the life-giving touch of its maker. The collector's enemy is the museum curator. Ideally, museums should be looted every fifty years, and their collections returned to circulation.

These are not sentiments that the public-spirited Jordan Wright would have endorsed. An endearingly enthusiastic evangelist for the democratic process, at the time of his death he was busy creating a permanent Museum of Democracy to house his collection. All the same, I suspect that he would have understood what Utz was talking about. The two or three times he showed me those items he kept in his Manhattan apartment (the rest of his trove was, he told me tantalizingly, "stored in a warehouse") he made them live as no one else could, weaving their backstories in with tales of their acquisition to form one unique whole.

Unique. Not perfect. It never could be that. The nature of Jordan's collection is that it was always a work in progress. That must have been part of the fun, the thrill of a chase that could never end, a pursuit that clearly intrigued him, entranced him, and, with its unavoidable (if you're the sort of collector who once tried to buy a costume off an anti-GOP protestor's back, it comes with the territory) moments of absurdity, hugely amused him. Jordan Wright was serious about his collection, but he was a man who knew absurdity when he saw it. And, I think, loved it.

And, oh yes, he managed to buy that costume. But you'd already guessed that. ♦

GARY MAMAY / JORDAN M WRIGHT / FIRST SMITHSONIAN BOOKS

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Oliver's Story

Josh Brolin plays Will Ferrell playing George W. Bush.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Oliver Stone accused Lyndon Johnson of killing John F. Kennedy in one film, and Richard Nixon of killing John F. Kennedy in another film. He portrayed a typical Vietnam platoon as a bunch of crazed rapists and pillagers who finally kill their evil lieutenant. And now, in the capstone of his bizarre career, Oliver Stone takes on George W. Bush, the figurehead of a thousand conspiracies as deep and dark as any of the ones Stone has spun over the years.

W.
Directed by Oliver Stone

Surely, Stone's *W.* would prove to be the dream film of every Kos diarist, every obsessive follower of the monstrous injustices done to Ambassador Joseph Wilson IV and Valerie Plame, not to mention every boy and girl who ever hooked up at a MoveOn.org meet-up.

Stone's tinfoil hat constituency is going to be gobsmacked by *W.* The movie, dull as dishwater and twice as tepid, is a pointless portrait of a perfectly decent, somewhat dim, well-meaning fellow who sincerely believed there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, wanted only to bring democracy to the suffering peoples of the Middle East, is loved by his wife, not loved enough by his father and mother, and never meant anybody any harm.

Josh Brolin

SIDNEY RAY BALDWIN / LIONSGATE

Considering the sorts of things that have been said, written, and put on film about George W. Bush over the past few years, *W.* is astonishingly anodyne. Stone's Bush may be a boob, but he's not a bad man by any means. He's not much of anything, really. As a kid, he's a party boy who doesn't seem to be enjoying the party all that much. He's shiftless, but he has reason to be, as he is oppressed by the arch disappointment expressed toward him by his patrician father.

As an adult, he finds he can't escape his father's shadow. He does, however, find solace in sobriety and religion, as a celebrity preacher (Stacy Keach, in a spectacular turn) guides his path toward Jesus. Then he meets Karl Rove (the unctuously dwarfish Toby Jones), who tells him he is a star and guides his political career. Eventually, in the White House, he bumbles along cheerfully, hungry for Saddam's hide, very focused on getting his three-mile run in, and allows himself to be guided by his vice president (Richard Dreyfuss, whose Dick Cheney is about as Wyoming-born as Sholom Aleichem).

The portrait of George W. Bush offered in this movie will, I would wager, prove as tiresome, obvious, and boring to the Kos Kids as it did to me. They knew all this years ago: Bush choking on a pretzel, Bush calling himself "the Decider," Bush asking "Is our children learning." Stone's Bush, aided by Stanley Weiser's screenplay and Josh Brolin's exceedingly superficial performance, is basically a humorless version of Will Ferrell's *Saturday Night Live* caricature.

It's a perfectly terrible movie, obvious and overly deliberate in the manner of a biographical picture made for television in the 1970s. Stone does more than allude to Bush's drinking problem; he photographs every scene in the years leading up to W.'s renunciation of alcohol with a bottle of Jack Daniels prominently featured either right next to the camera or right next to Bush. *W.* travels across decades, with bad makeup and hairstyle alterations used to suggest the passage of time. Weiser's screenplay is embarrassingly "on the nose," as the Hollywood cliché has it—rife with dialogue that comes out and says with exclamation points what ought to be understood.

"You're not a Kennedy, you're a Bush!" shouts 41 to 43. "Act like one!"

"Why don't you love me like you love Jeb?" George W. says to his father.

"Tell him what you think," Barbara says when 41 is awake at Kennebunkport at three in the morning just before the Iraq war. "This thing is eating you up inside!"

"Here's the real target," says Dick Cheney in the Situation Room as the map in front of him magically changes color and Cheney is cast into shadow. "*IRAN.*"

"You have besmirched the family name!" the father Bush says to the son Bush in an empty Oval Office. "Two hundred years of work up in smoke because of this . . . fiasco!" (Of course, just as when *Dallas* jumped the shark, the Oval Office scene is only a dream.)

And on and on it goes, so much so that for the first time in my moviegoing life, I longed for the old Oliver Stone, the one who would have turned George W. Bush into a Machiavellian maneuverer who only plays dumb to gull the liberals into a stupor, and goes to war in Iraq to help the FBI and the CIA hide evidence of JFK's assassination, for which his father was responsible, somewhere in Falluja, with the secret assistance of Osama bin Laden.

W. proves there's nothing more boring than a wild man who goes straight. That's true of its protagonist, and even more true of its director. ♦

John Podhoretz, editorial director of Commentary, *is* THE WEEKLY STANDARD*'s movie critic.*

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Not A Parody

"Madonna and Guy Ritchie have agreed to divorce after seven-and-a-half years of marriage, their representatives confirmed today. They have both requested that the media maintain respect for their family at this difficult time."

—Statement from Freud Communications, London, October 15

the weekly Standard
October 27, 2008

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